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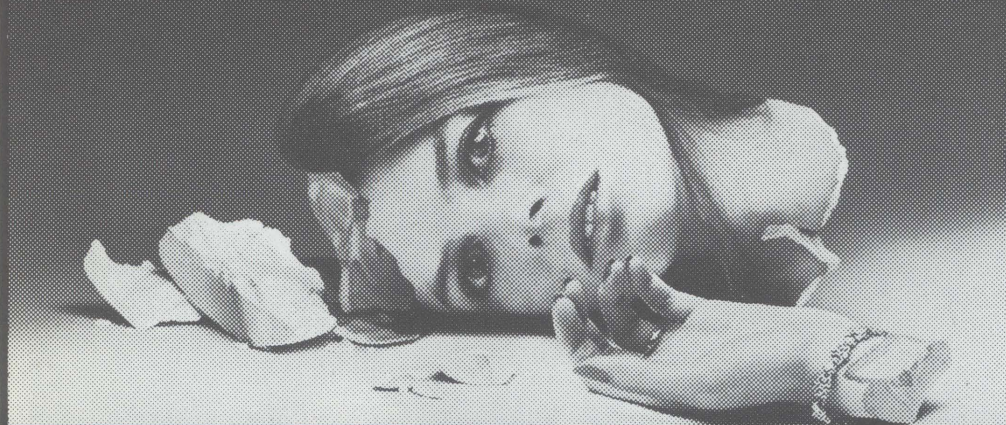
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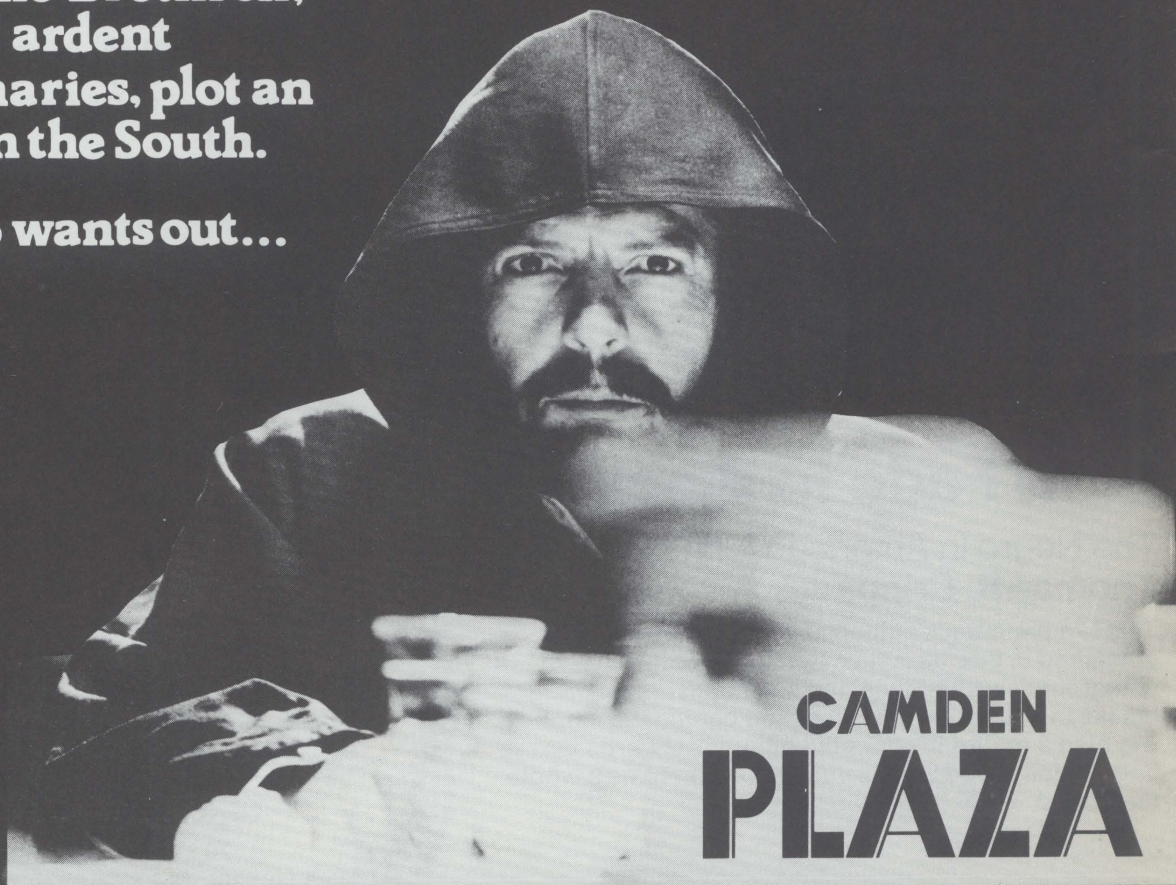
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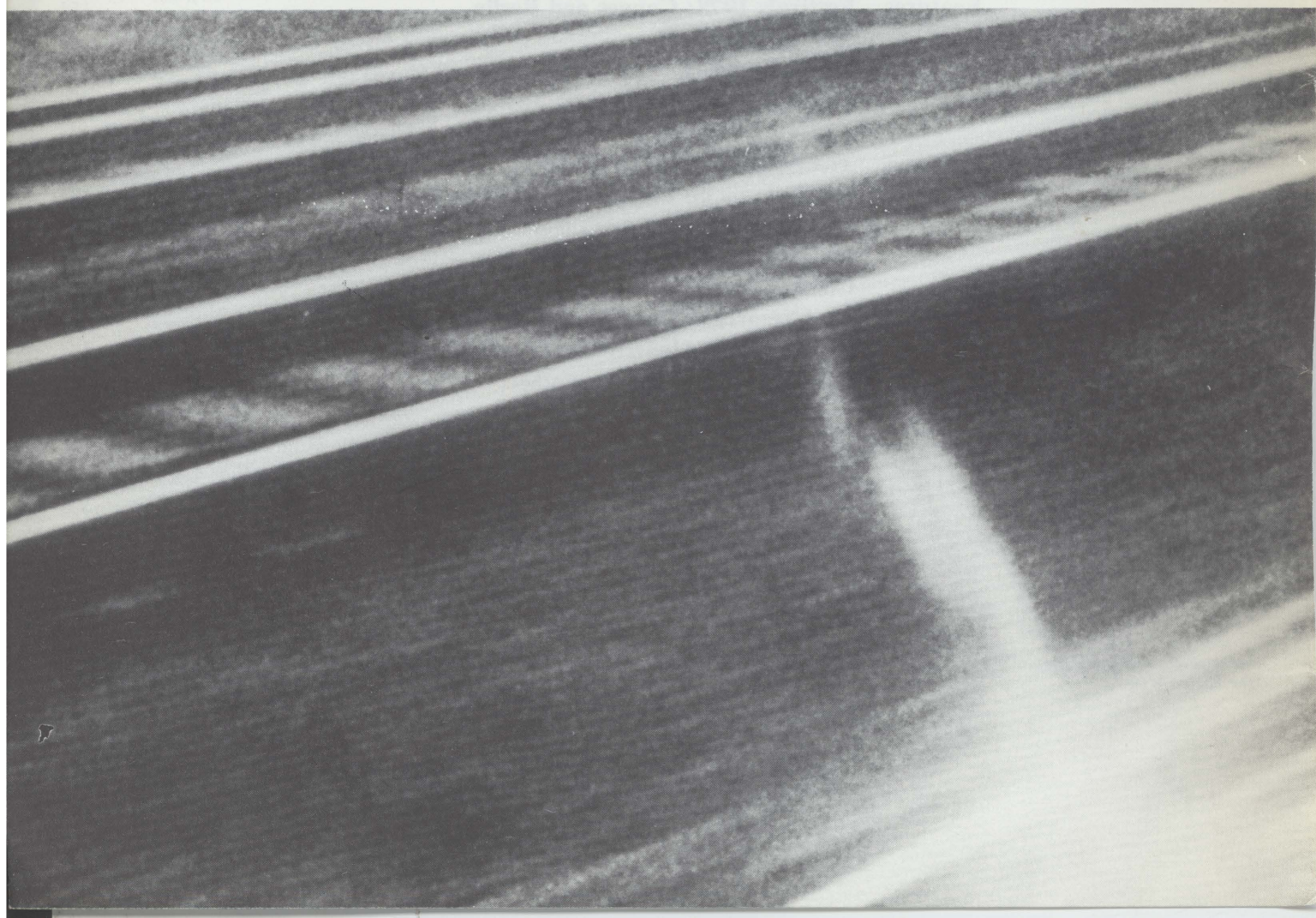
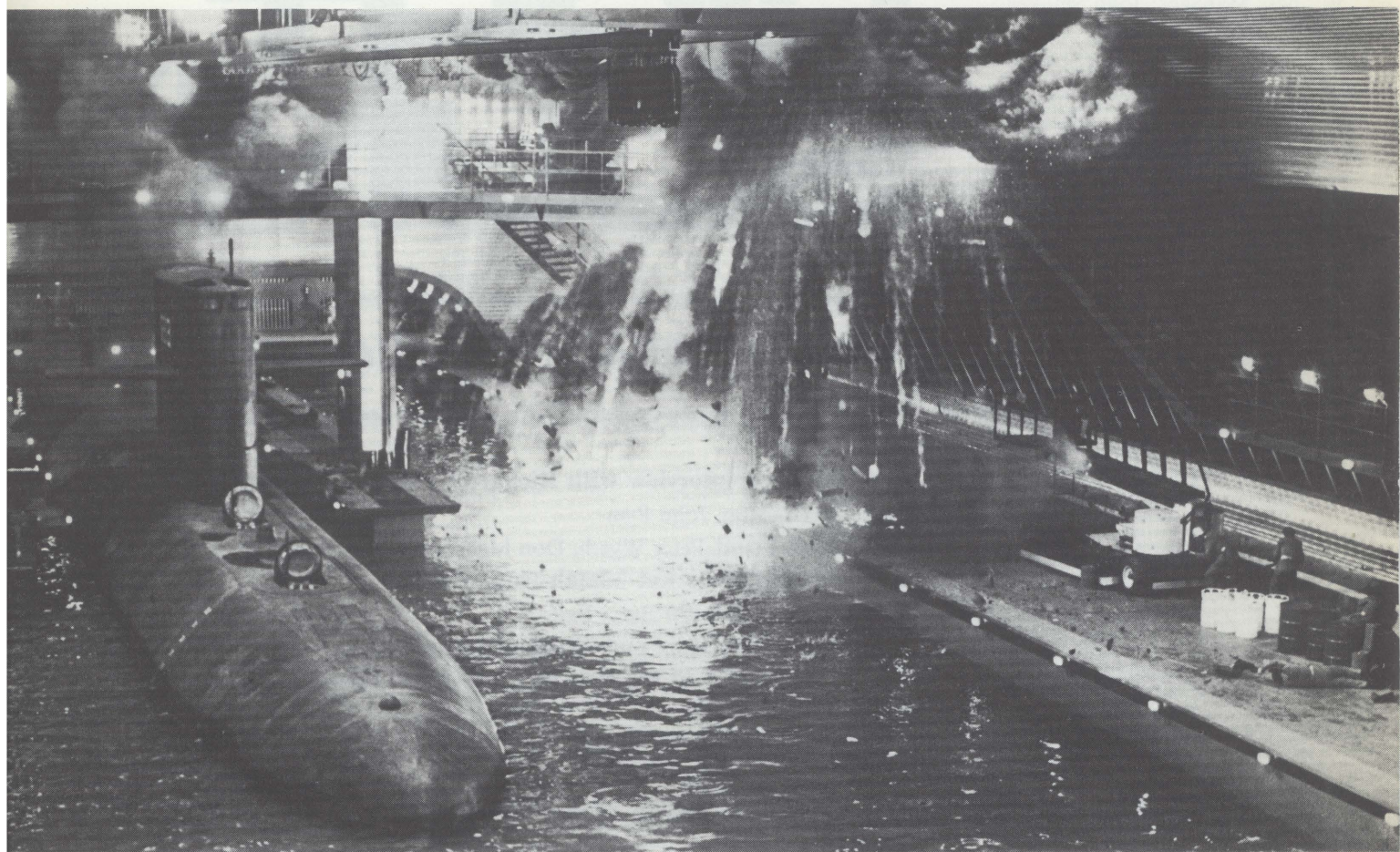
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On the cover: Anthony Harvey's
'The Eagle's Wing'

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BRITISH FILM CULTURE AND



The European Community

Vincent Porter

'It is necessary to be clear what we mean by "culture", so that we may be clear about the distinction between the material organisation of Europe and the spiritual organism of Europe. If the latter dies, what you will organise will not be Europe, but merely a mass of human beings speaking different languages. And there will be no longer any justification for their continuing to speak different languages, for they will no longer have anything to say which cannot be said equally well in any language.'—T.S. Eliot, *The Unity of Europe*, 1946

It is often argued that film is an art and that therefore film policy should be determined by cultural as well as by commercial criteria. If so, what is meant by film culture? Can the relatively crude levers of power which politicians and policy-makers have at their command be set to encourage and nurture a British film culture? If so, can we determine the quality of the culture that we want, or is the task to build an alternative set of economic and social relations between the film-maker and his public within which such a culture may take root and flourish? What types of policies could encourage or support such a culture or alternative system and remain compatible with the political, legal and economic limitations within which policy-makers in the European Community have to work? These are complex questions, but questions which must be faced if it is to be argued that film is to be supported in Britain for cultural reasons. To begin to answer them, it is necessary to return to Eliot's distinction between the material organisation of Europe and its spiritual organism, for where film is concerned the two are closely related.

'The European cultural dimension acquires its cultural validity from all the national and regional cultures it brings together, with the result that the cultural riches of the various countries and regions of the Community can in no way be considered as wayward trends, to be discouraged or forgotten, but one of the basic features of a European identity and a valuable Community asset.'—Commission of the European Communities, *Community Action in the Cultural Sector*, 1976

British films: the more and the less.
Top left: explosion in one of Ken Adam's spectacular sets in *The Spy Who Loved Me*.
Left: *'Time and Motion'*, made by Tony Sinden for the British Film Institute Production Board

Can We Build a Community Film Culture?

The dominant film culture of Europe is that of the big budget picture, produced, financed and distributed by the multinational corporations. A culture which may be represented by films such as Columbia's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Fox's *Star Wars*, United Artists' *The Spy Who Loved Me* and CIC's *Jaws*. There are clear economic reasons for this (see, for instance, David Gordon's 'Why the Movie Majors are Major', *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1973.) Put briefly, they are the necessary linkage of film producing and financing on a large scale to international distribution. The major international distributors are powerful because they have built up a detailed knowledge of the world market, they control the marketing and sales of all the films they distribute and, in addition, they make a high distribution charge for all the films they handle, thus generating finance for reinvestment in production. Conversely, all attempts to finance and produce films without distributing them have failed in the long term.

For many in the European Community, particularly those finance and distribution interests centred on the Commission Internationale du Credit Cinématographique (CICREC) and the Fédération Internationale des Associations de Distributeurs de Films (FIAD), the way forward is to build a Community film culture by building up the distribution and financing of films on a Community-wide scale. This could be achieved by harmonising the automatic aid schemes of the member states, such as Britain's Eady levy, into one Community-wide film aid fund. It would be accompanied by the film banks of Europe, such as the National Film Finance Corporation and Italy's Autonomous Film Credit Section of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, pooling their funds to finance a run of high budget productions. (See, for instance, Agusti, Degand and Monaco in *Film in Europe*, Polytechnic of Central London, 1974.) The main rationale of such a proposal is undoubtedly the formation of European multinational corporations which could compete in the world market with the Hollywood majors. Advocates of reorganising the financing and distribution of Europe's films in this way do not claim that it will lead to the multifaceted European cultural dimension which the Commission seeks to encourage, but rather that it would generate a Community culture which would be qualitatively different from that of *Jaws*, *Star Wars* or *The Spy Who Loved Me*.

One objection is that the concept of a Community film culture would not make sense in cultural terms, whatever the legal and commercial logic. How could a new culture emerge from a multiple shotgun marriage of the nine political, seven linguistic and three or more religious cultural elements represented within the Community? This objection, though pertinent, need not necessarily have

any cultural validity, for we are talking about a future culture and not a past tradition. There are many who see Hollywood's cultural contribution to America as having been precisely that of forging a new American consciousness from the aristocratic tradition of the Confederate states, the brash pioneering spirit of the industrialised East and a host of polyglot immigrant sub-cultures, by welding them together in the white heat of the capitalist expansionary drive of the major film companies. Within the Community, however, the political will necessary to generate such forces is missing. Already a crude political and cultural division has opened up between proponents of an Anglo-Saxon film culture, led by many in Britain who are concerned not to destroy their traditional links with American sources of finance and distribution, and proponents of a romance film culture, led by many in France and Italy for whom the concept of a Community culture is more or less identical with their romance heritage. So long as these divisions exist, a Community film culture is unlikely either in theory or in practice.

Perhaps a more important objection, however, is that the formation of multinational corporations would *not* lead to a distinctive Community culture, whatever the political will of the Community. The commercial relations between the member states and the rest of the western world are regulated by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The general principle of GATT is to open up the world market to international trade. Clause IV of GATT does permit signatory states to protect their film industries by establishing a national screen quota. It forbids, however, the allocation of screen time in a way which distinguishes between sources of supply, even if drawn from screen time reserved for national quota. The European Community, on the other hand, permits only a Community screen quota which, in effect, requires member states to distinguish between foreign films originating from within the Community and those originating from outside. Whether, therefore, the European Community can legitimately protect its film industry by the operation of a Community screen quota seems open to doubt.

Finally, it would not be in the commercial interests of these new European multinationals to develop a culture qualitatively different from that of the Hollywood majors. The film industry, like many other cultural activities, is prone to suffer from what economists have come to term 'Baumol's Disease'. (See 'On the Performing Arts: The Anatomy of their Economic Problems' by W.J. Baumol and W.G. Bowen, *American Economic Review*, May 1956.) Put briefly, what Baumol discovered was that with certain labour-intensive industries, in which technical progress is incapable of raising the productivity of labour, the wages from more productive sectors of the economy will spill over into other sectors, such as film production and marketing, in the form of rising prices for activities such as film

financing, processing and advertising as well as in salaries for actors and technicians. These are cost inflationary unless they can be offset by productivity gains. In the film industry, productivity gains have been achieved by expanding the market to global proportions rather than by reducing film production costs. For the Hollywood majors, further gains from widening the world market are now becoming impossible to achieve, although they may be able to obtain some relief by raising their rental terms to exhibitors, as has recently been the case for *Jaws* and *Star Wars*, or by increasing their sale prices to television.

The inflationary pressures of Baumol's Disease will affect the proposed European multinationals in precisely the way they affect the Hollywood majors. They will therefore have to look either to reducing their labour costs, possibly by producing their films outside the Community, or to maximising the marketing potential of their products by making films which ape the dominant Hollywood culture. For example, EMI, which is potentially the type of European multinational distributor envisaged by proponents of such a development, is now participating in some \$19m worth of films such as *Convoy*, *The Deerhunter* and *Driver*. These are being produced in Hollywood in order, as Michael Deeley, joint managing director of EMI Films, has put it, 'to make films that couldn't be dismissed as foreign product.'

'In our view, broadcasters should see themselves primarily as impresarios ensuring that the best talents are secured for current programmes, and recognising that they must nurse, encourage and bring along the talented but inexperienced. They have to balance the money they have for present patronage with their shrewd investment in the cultural future. But they cannot become Fairy Godmother to the long line of Cinderellas in the arts.'—Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting, 1977

Is Television Our Alternative Film Culture?

The inexorable economic pressures of Baumol's Disease which are tending to homogenise and unify the international film industry make it necessary to step back and view the linkage of production, distribution and exhibition as an integrated international cultural system. Any policy that seeks to produce films which are qualitatively different must be evaluated in terms of the relationship between it and the dominant cultural system. Whatever system is set up, the differences will have to exist in structural and economic terms, for there is no way in which the state can prevent the free movement of individuals, ideas or aesthetic practices between one system and another.

The clearest example of an alternative system which exists is, of course, television. In its preliminary ruling given to the Tribunale di Biella, the European Court of Justice ruled that the existence of a television monopoly



British films that make money: Albie Bass and George Harrison Marks in 'Come Play With Me', which has taken more than £200,000 in a year's West End run

was not contrary to the Treaty of Rome, although it could be if the monopoly discriminated in favour of national goods and products. However, although the Court laid down strict non-discrimination provisions regulating the purchase and transmission of completed films by television institutions, its ruling on the production of television programmes was less severe. 'For the performance of their tasks,' the Court noted, 'these establishments remain subject to the prohibitions against discrimination and, to the extent that this performance comprises activities of an economic nature, fall under the provisions referred to in Article 90 relating to public undertakings and undertakings to which member states grant special or exclusive rights.'

Article 90 provides that 'such undertakings shall be subject to the rules contained in the Treaty, in particular to rules on competition, in so far as the application of such rules does not obstruct the performance, in law or in fact, of the particular task assigned to them.' It also provides that the development of trade must not be affected to such an extent as would be contrary to the interests of the Community. The television cultural system must therefore seek to work within a policy space which is defined on one side by the particular tasks assigned to it, but limited on the other by this proviso. If the interests of the Community do lie in encouraging and supporting all regional and national cultures, as the Commission has suggested, and if, as the Annan Committee has indicated, broadcasters should nurse and bring along the talented but inexperienced, then the television system could provide a possible alternative system for developing and encouraging a separate film culture which would also be compatible with the terms of the Rome Treaty.

But television, too, is prone to the ravages of Baumol's Disease. Perhaps more so than the international film industry. Although it has managed to reduce production costs when compared with those for cinema films, and to achieve productivity gains by distributing its films electronically on a national scale, these gains have now been consolidated. Further productivity gains depend on television marketing its product internationally or—and this comes to the same thing—participating in international co-productions. Some relief from Baumol's Disease may be obtained by increasing television revenues, although there are crucially different cultural implications between raising revenues which come from selling

advertising time and raising those which come from licence fees. More important for assessing the relations between film and television from a cultural point of view is that additional revenues may be raised from various forms of film/television co-production. This practice is becoming increasingly common (for some details of European practices, see my article 'Television and Film Production in Europe', *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1977). Such moves indicate a progressive integration of the film and television cultural systems which maximises the productivity gains of a given film by screening it to both cinema and television audiences.

In the United Kingdom, at least, the future relationship between the film and television cultural systems is still under discussion. Unfortunately, the Terry Committee and the Annan Committee both failed to give any careful analysis to the long-term economic future of the media on which they were reporting, which must seriously qualify the policy proposals they have made for the future relationship of film and television. It would be possible to reorient the role of television and charge it with a cultural responsibility which overtly required it to encourage and support films qualitatively different from those screened in the world's cinemas; but unless such a policy is clearly articulated, and the funds necessary to finance it are provided, then the progressive integration of the film and television cultural systems must surely continue.

Can We Invest in a National Film Culture?

Given the limitations which the European Community imposes on state intervention in the cinema economy, and the economic pressures towards progressive integration of the film and television systems, is there any serious possibility of developing an alternative film culture? There are really two separate approaches which, while advocating an economic restructuring of the industry, often justify this by the cultural differentiation of the films which would emerge. The 'moderate' solution, such as that advanced by the Terry Committee, looks to a revamped NFFC and a redistribution of the Eady levy on a selective basis to films selected on a cultural basis, to the National Film School, National Film Development Fund, Children's Film Foundation and the BFI Production Board. The 'extreme' solution involves either nationalisation of film distribution, which is almost certainly incompatible with the Treaty of Rome, or—and this would be legally possible—the establishment of a vertically integrated and publicly owned film sector encompassing exhibition, distribution and production. The latter might or might not be linked to the BBC.

There is, it seems to me, a key ambiguity which underlies all these proposals. This is the question of who pays. Sometimes there is an assumption that all that is necessary is more capital to make the industry commercially viable and that this could be solved by a Government loan to the film industry. If this is so, what security would the industry be prepared to advance against such a loan? Would, for instance, the film distributors who own cinemas be prepared to mortgage their

cinemas, as the Hollywood majors had to mortgage theirs to Wall Street in the 20s? What security could cinemas which want to take advantage of the proposed loan fund for modernisation and improvement offer, other than their freeholds? On other occasions, the assumption is that what the industry needs is aid. If this is the case, then it will be necessary to assess the cultural or social value of the aid, a point I shall return to.

Unfortunately, the proposals outlined in the Terry Report do not help to clarify this crucial ambiguity—indeed they make it worse. The Report rejects the concept of a loan, arguing that the new capital fund it proposes should not be saddled with interest payments. It proposes instead government investment in the industry. Government revenues would come from profits, not from interest. What would be the cultural effect of such a change?

The shift from loaning money to the industry to investing in it would, if the funds were properly administered, mean they would have to be invested in films on terms no less favourable than those in which private sector investors were prepared to participate. A tentative comparison can be deduced from the table on this page. In 1977, for the first time for several years, the NFFC was able to loan money to films over and above those funds it had invested with the National Film Finance Consortium. Since the Consortium now has the opportunity of investing in all projects for which the Corporation is prepared to advance loans, it can be assumed that the Consortium chose to invest in only two of those films to which the Corporation was prepared to loan money—*The Duellists* and *Jabberwocky*. Both these pictures were distributed and co-financed by the Hollywood majors. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Government investment in the film industry would involve Government money ever more closely with the interests of the Hollywood majors; and whatever the merits of such a strategy in industrial and employment terms, it would have a negligible cultural effect.

What Categories of Aid Can We Give?

The nature and form of aid which member states can give to films is severely circumscribed by the provisions of the Rome Treaty. The four film directives of the Community have effectively prohibited any intervention which seeks to limit the free flow of films between member states or which limits the right of establishment of film producers, distributors or exhibitors. Decisions by the European Court of Justice

have specified that the method of financing aid cannot be separated from the way in which aid is allocated, and have rendered illegal any discrimination between Community citizens on the ground of nationality. Not surprisingly, therefore, the European Commission is taking steps to require member states to dismantle their automatic aid funds, such as Britain's Eady levy. The categories of aid compatible with the Treaty are specified in article 92. These include aid having a social character granted to individual consumers, provided that such aid is granted without discrimination related to the origin of the products concerned, and aid intended to facilitate the development of certain economic activities where such aid does not affect trading conditions to an extent contrary to the common interest.

Neither of these categories is specifically cultural, though it could be argued that aid granted for cultural purposes did indeed have a social character. If this were the case, it would seem necessary to specify the social character of the proposed cultural intervention with some care. The role of the British Film Institute as specified in its Memorandum of Association is 'to encourage the development of the art of the film'; while the first task of the Arts Council as laid down in its Charter is 'to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Arts' (my emphasis). Would the social character of the proposed cultural aid overlap with these tasks, or does a policy space exist between the exigencies of the international film industry on the one hand and the duties and responsibilities of the BFI and the Arts Council on the other? The Interim Action Committee has proposed that the British Film Authority 'should be charged with fostering and promoting the well-being of film,' where 'film' is defined as 'a comprehensive term to describe not only the making, processing and marketing of films of all kinds, but also the whole range of activities, industrial, commercial, artistic and educational, which fall within our terms of reference.' Not, I should have thought, a precise enough definition to justify aid having a social character.

No doubt it would be possible to define the purpose of giving aid to the film industry, but until we do have an agreed definition, it makes it extremely difficult to put forward criteria by which the successful implementation of such an aid policy could be assessed. Proponents of aid to the industry have nevertheless been eloquent in advocating the mechanisms by which such aid would be disbursed, presumably on a non-discriminatory basis. These have taken two basic forms—post-production prizes for films or tax concessions to exhibitors who

screen them, and pre-production loans. Both mechanisms present problems of legislative definition, and the effectiveness by which these aims might be achieved needs to be explored with some care.

'Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection. It moves by the force, not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge, but also of the moral and social passion for doing good.'—Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869

It is at the exhibition end of the film system that it is easiest to be specific about the social character of aid to the film industry. The British film establishment has been notably coy, however, in giving any indication of what it considers a good film. Since 1972, the Cinematograph Films Council has given extensions of quota life to *The Mikado*, 2001—*A Space Odyssey*, *The Lion in Winter*, *Oliver*, *The Railway Children* and *Tales of Beatrix Potter* on the grounds that they were 'films of exceptional artistic or entertainment value'. The Terry Report advanced *Room at the Top*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *If . . .*, *Oliver* and *Murder on the Orient Express* as films which were 'important and successful'. Both these categories have tended to conflate artistic and commercial excellence into an unproblematic unity. Is this what is meant by culture? If so, can it be argued that such a definition meets the criteria of article 92?

Readers of SIGHT AND SOUND and patrons of art-house cinemas, on the other hand, might argue for films directed by Antonioni, Chabrol, Fassbinder, Fellini or Resnais. While it is true that in France there is an arcane critical following for films directed by Terence Fisher and others making Hammer horror films, it would be fair, I think, to say that it is not in the field of the art-house picture that British film-makers have established their reputation. Do we want to encourage the exhibition of a style of films at which we, the British members of the Community, have developed no tradition? Should public money be spent to encourage the screening of these films in cinemas rather than on television, where they are now being shown with increasing frequency?

It is possible to envisage another criterion of merit. 'Here during a quarter of a century were made many films projecting Britain and the British character' was how Sir Michael Balcon summed up the work of Ealing Films on a plaque erected at Ealing Studios in 1955. The recent critical and industrial interest in Ealing films might indicate that it is to such an area that we should look for the social character of our aid. If so, how would this relate to the commercial criteria of the tourist industry? How close should the film image of the British way of life be to the British Tourist Authority's visions of our nostalgic past? The commercial imperatives of the American market have already given a strong impetus to the production of British costume dramas made for both cinemas and television. Is British culture a nation talking to itself about its historic past, or is it a nation talking to

Films Financed by the National Film Finance Corporation, year ending 31 March 1977 (* indicates Consortium participation)

Title	Amount Approved	Distributor
*THE DUELLISTS	£206,000	Paramount Pictures Corporation
*JABBERWOCKY		Columbia Pictures Corporation
BLACK JOY	£381,826	Hemdale International
TARKA THE OTTER		Rank Film Distributors
THE DISAPPEARANCE		—



Image for the Tourist Authority? English idyll in Bryan Forbes' *'International Velvet'*

itself about the British way of life in a member state of the European Community in the last quarter of the twentieth century?

It would also be possible to relate the social character of the aid to Arnold's definition of culture laid down over a century ago, as being motivated by the moral and social passion for doing good. Should we encourage, for instance, films which defend the interests of the downtrodden and the oppressed in our society? Certainly the television work of Tony Garnett and Ken Loach, of Colin Welland, of Jim Allen and Roy Battersby, has achieved a substantial critical reputation in Germany and in Scandinavia. Is this the type of film that we wish to support so as to counter the perennial and unproblematic optimism of most box-office successes?

Are all these questions too difficult to face? Would it be better, at the end of the day, to delegate these tasks to a select committee of the great and the good, who although they would change from year to year, would simply exercise their discerning judgment, or should it be inflicted their elitist prejudices, on an uninterested public? It could be argued that their decisions were, by definition, non-discriminatory, since they would be made against no coherent criteria other than those of satisfying the taste and judgment of the awards panel.

'It was all in the script, a disillusioned writer will tell you. But it was never all in the script. If it were, why make the movie?'—Nicholas Ray, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1956

The problems of making awards to finished films pale into insignificance when compared to those of making pre-production advances to film projects. Should the award be made on the basis of the script, or should it be made to a 'package' of script plus film-makers? The

Annan Committee expected the broadcasters to 'bring along' the talented but inexperienced. Are these the criteria which we should demand of the allocators of pre-production advances? If so, could they be squared with the non-discriminatory requirements of article 92? Are there other restrictions which could be imposed without upsetting Brussels? One such might be that of residence. The European Court has ruled (Case 39/75) that a member state is entitled to lay down measures to prevent a supplier of services in its territory but who is resident outside it from using his freedom to supply services. Could it be argued that the 'cultural medium' of Britain—a phrase which appears in several Community film directives—will be defined by, let us say, anyone who has resided in this country for ten years? Would this criterion apply to the scriptwriter, to the director, to the main actors or to all of them? Could an award be made to a legal person, a company, or could it only be made to physical persons?

If advances were to be made only to residents, should there be any restrictions as to how the advances were spent? In 1976, £8.4m was spent abroad in producing British films, of which £1.3m was spent within the European Community. Should the advance be limited to costs incurred within the United Kingdom, regardless of who received the award? Should it be limited to expenditure on salaries, to ease the unemployment situation, or would this be an impossible restriction on cultural creativity?

To this host of problems of defining the criteria against which advances should be made, we need to add some consideration of whether a scheme of pre-production advances can actually play any role in building up an alternative culture. How would the size of the advance compare with the total production budget? Would it cover all the production cost, like many loans from the BFI Production Board or the Arts Council, thus ensuring that very few, if any, feature films

would be supported? Would it require a matching investment from private sources, as do most NFFC loans? Should there be separate funds for 'commercial' and 'cultural' films, as is the practice in Sweden? Many similar schemes set up overseas are falling down precisely because insufficient thought has been given to their detailed operation. Writing in the Spring *SIGHT AND SOUND*, David Overbey noted that the French Advance against Receipts had been attacked in the *Chambre des Députés* for always funding 'leftist films which attack the ideas the majority of Frenchmen hold dear.' The left, however, also find the scheme unsatisfactory. The Communist authors of *Cinéma, Culture ou Profit* argue that the funds are insufficient for financing a film adequately and that they only 'attract the attention of certain producers who undertake the production of films benefiting from an advance without providing the necessary complementary finances and who require the film to be shot with only the money from the advance or with an inadequate crew.' Sometimes, as Overbey pointed out, films which have received an advance acquire such a low commercial reputation that no producer will consider them.

What type of cultural tradition can be built if producers have to finance their films both from Government advances invested with cultural objectives in view and from private investors operating on commercial motives? The question of the ultimate purpose of Government aid is, of course, absolutely crucial if a successful marriage of public and private funds is to be achieved. And yet there are many who would argue that the marriage of private capital invested for profit and public funds invested for social, and by implication non-profitable, purposes is a contradiction in terms.

Whatever the outcome, the films will still need to be distributed and screened. 'Making sure that films are not only made but seen is more difficult than it sounds,' noted the Arts Council in its latest Annual Report. Both the Council and the BFI Production Board have now found it necessary to move into the distribution and marketing of the films they support. Will the same be necessary for films which receive an advance? And will it be necessary to expand into exhibition? Overbey also noted that a film in Paris needs to be a 'respectable' success within five days, or it runs the risk of never being seen again.

The continual and recurring contradictions which come from trying to build an alternative system from commercial interests and Government support have led many to conclude that what is needed is not public support, but a publicly owned film system.

Can We Build a Public Film Culture?

The concept of a publicly owned film system is compatible with the Treaty of Rome, provided that it is not a monopoly system without private sector competition. Although the Community film directives provide for the right of establishment of producers, distributors and exhibitors, article 222 of the Treaty provides that the Treaty shall in no way prejudice the rules in member states pertaining to form or type of ownership. But

what in the film cultural system is worth owning? Television's main asset consists in having the right to broadcast when frequency allocations are extremely limited. Owning distribution is fairly meaningless; all you end up with is an office in Wardour Street. Cinema ownership is only meaningful in cultural terms if it can be on a scale which commands enough weight to book films that would not be booked by other exhibitors. The system could not be run at a profit unless these films met with the approval of the public, and generated enough revenue to pay the cinema overheads and the film rentals.

It would be possible to envisage a scenario whereby the public ownership of cinemas was so extensive that they could attract the exhibition of the most successful films of the Hollywood majors, and could use the profits so generated to subsidise the production, distribution and exhibition of a limited number of modestly budgeted public sector feature films. To set up any such system would require a considerable act of political will, and the rationale would surely need to be economic and industrial (rather than cultural) to justify the very sizeable outlay of public funds necessary to purchase the cinemas. While such a scenario might have industrial and commercial merit, its cultural value would be limited, for cinemas which switch programming patterns to and fro, for instance between Hollywood box-office successes and distinctly different British films, tend to lose their programming identity very quickly. Such a public system might well be able to act as an impresario for British talent, but we should be guarded in our expectations of the cultural differentiation it would produce. It would ensure that the films it produced received adequate public screenings. It too, however, would be prone to Baumol's Disease.

'A millionaire with a private cinematograph, all the necessary props and a troupe of intelligent actors could, if he wished, make practically all of his inner life known . . . Of course, it is not desirable that any one man, short of a genius, should make a show of his inner life. What is wanted is to discover the now nameless feelings that men have in common . . . I am sure that the film, with its almost limitless powers of representation, could accomplish this in the hands of the right investigators, though putting thoughts into visible shape would not always be easy—in fact at first it might be as difficult as any other art.'—George Orwell, *New Words*, 1940

Do We Need a New Relationship between Film-makers and the Public?

The seeming impossibility of devising a cultural film policy which will produce works that are qualitatively different, given the exigencies of the Treaty of Rome and the ravages of Baumol's Disease, has led many, particularly those associated with the avant-garde among Britain's film-makers, to question the fundamental assumptions on which



Image for the social conscience? Miners' Wales in Karl Francis' 'Above Us the Earth'

the relations between the film-maker and his audience are based. Films are produced and marketed in order that they can be performed and that performance consumed by the public in one viewing. Since the film itself is in no way consumed by being projected to a larger audience, or for more than one performance, the film system has grown to be an international system which is progressively eliminating the production of qualitatively different films in small secluded sections of the international market.

Allied to this growth has been the international protection of films both from being copied and from being performed without approval of the copyright owner. The system has therefore developed the practice of the international performance of films which are protected by copyright. Two major characteristics stand out. The viewer, even though he may see the film in a cinema, experiences the film alone; and, unlike folk culture, because of the copyright laws, the film is essentially transmitted from the maker to the audience without any *filmic* feedback or comment. Film criticism is limited to that which can be written or spoken.

Avant-garde and experimental film-makers have been concerned to explore the way the world has traditionally been represented in films, and in so doing have found it necessary to establish a different set of relationships with their audiences. The Film-maker and Exhibition pilot project of the BFI Production Board and the distribution practice established by the Independent Film-makers' Association, whereby a speaker goes out with the films when they are hired, are two indications of this. Almost without exception, these film-makers receive funds from state sources and have been attempting to use their films in a different way. Their mix of avant-garde and experimental representational practice, and of performance accompanied by discussion, frequently with other film-makers, forces us to question the

relationship between 'culture' and the traditional practice of making films and performing them to a mass audience. The current practices of avant-garde film-makers have not been articulated into a coherent policy which could be debated at national level, but these practices, combined with the creative opportunities offered by newer, cheaper recording technology, begin to make Orwell's dream possible.

Orwell's millionaire is not so different from a major film-maker working for the Hollywood multinationals. The practice of the avant-garde film-makers offers the possibilities for a culture where the viewer participates in an individual way and does not simply pay at the box-office, and where men and women can discover the nameless feelings that they do have in common by discussing films with their makers and each other, by remaking the films of others and by making their own. The role that the state should play in funding and encouraging such a film culture would need to be thought out with great care. While such a culture could become a part of that European cultural dimension which the European Commission advocates, it too may succumb to the homogenising pressures of Baumol's Disease if traditional assumptions are adopted about the copyright of images in these films, the access which members of the public may have to them and the relationship between the film-maker and his source of funds.

T.S. Eliot found it necessary to be clear about the distinction between the material organisation of Europe and its spiritual organism. As the economic and legislative pressures of the EEC harmonise and unify the material organisation of Europe, film culture must surely follow unless a way can be found to change the relationships between the film-maker, his audience and their sources of funds. The question is, how?

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Richard Craven



new

'The New Deal is a blueprint for the financing of British films which is designed to improve and protect the position of parties who provide finance for production by way of cash and services.' Thus begins a pamphlet, published in March, enumerating the principles of a new scheme which should—according to its chief architects, Richard Craven and Simon Perry, of the Association of Independent Producers—shortly be overseeing the production of a portfolio of four or five independent medium-budget British films. The New Deal is dedicated to the memory of Sir Michael Balcon and encapsulates several of the aspirations and proposals set out in his submission to the Interim Action Committee on the future of the British film industry (see SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1978).

To put the New Deal in motion a management company, under the chairmanship of Michael Flint, a former director of Paramount Pictures UK, has been formed to act as a conduit for information and services between investors and producers. This non-profit company, First Investors' Film Management, will, it is envisaged, put together a package of films each of which will conform to the New Deal formula. The overall budget of this package will be no more than £2 million and shooting on at least one film should be under way before the end of the year. FIFM will ensure that each film qualifies for Eady, that no one involved with a production receives a salary exceeding five per cent of the budget and that, in addition, the budget contains a 'marketing allocation' for promoting distribution equal to at least ten per cent of its total, or £10,000, whichever is greater. An independent trustee company, under the aegis of the Sun Alliance & London Insurance Group, will be responsible for the accounts of FIFM and for the distribution accounts of all the films which FIFM approves.

People working on individual productions will be encouraged to invest part of their salaries in that production. They will thereby become part-owners of the film and, if it is a success, derive a continuing income from it. By thus reducing the high fees of major artists, directors and writers, so it is argued, the risk to the cash investor may be substantially reduced. The AIP, two of whose members will sit on FIFM's seven-member board of directors, will be responsible for negotiations to ensure trade union approval for all New Deal films. FIFM's full-time executive producers are Craven and Perry, who have between them varied experience of

writing, directing and producing for both television and the independent cinema. Below they outline their thoughts about the New Deal.

RICHARD CRAVEN: The formulation of the New Deal and the foundation of First Investors' Film Management is the end of a long story. It started off with the fact that there was in Britain no basic structure outside the major distributor-financiers to which film-makers could turn for production money. Independent producers have tried to reduce their budgets by offering 'participation' to the actors and other people creatively involved. But because of the structure they could usually only offer deferred payments, so that the creative people came at the very end of the line and the inducements weren't very attractive. The independent producer would love to have been able to treat the actor or the writer as a 'first investor', on a par with the NFFC or a bank; but the structure wouldn't let him do that. So it was on this basis that we had discussions with Sir Michael Balcon, who explained schemes that he had operated in the past, and the idea developed of creating a sort of stock or share in a film.

The next stage, equally important, was to incorporate the cost of marketing a film within its production budget. In other words, we thought that if we could make investment at the creative end more attractive, thereby enabling the producer to reduce his film's cash budget by say thirty per cent, we could also insist that he put into the budget a minimum of ten per cent towards marketing it. The New Deal idea emerged out of a combination of these two factors, but it was only last December, after meetings between

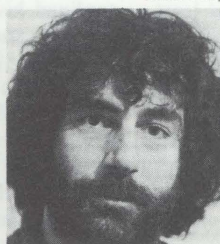
Michael Flint, myself and Simon Perry, that the actual notion of setting up an independent body in the private sector came about. We reckoned that if we could reduce a picture's cash cost, then we might also be able to attract independent finance, from television and record companies, from city sources, insurance companies and so on, and from private individuals, who might like to put £1,000 into a film in the same way they would invest it in the stock market.

SIMON PERRY: The injection of equity capital into the film industry is one of the things we are after. The reason we didn't go to the National Film Finance Corporation had to do with the mechanics of the New Deal. We felt very early on that, if we were going to have an effective management company, this company must have an extremely vigorous marketing arm. The NFFC, of course, doesn't have this and it didn't really seem to be structured in a way that encouraged us to think it could develop such a thing. But of course there is no reason why the NFFC should not invest in a New Deal picture, in which case it would act as its own trustee company.

You said that your plans grew out of talks with Sir Michael Balcon. Is there any sort of link to Bryanston, which was an attempt at getting a group of film-makers to work together?

CRAVEN: As I recall, Bryanston wished to distribute its own films. Our scheme is slightly different, because we are simply saying that if a film is made under the New Deal and if First Investors' Film Management is going to administer it, then money must be set aside for its marketing. Too often in this country, when independent films are made outside the orthodox structure, they simply end up on the shelf because there is nobody prepared to take the risk of distributing them. The advantage of the New Deal is that the people who take the risk in making the film have the same incentive to put money into marketing it: it's all in the budget, part of the same bundle. And as a very last resort, if no distributor could be interested in a film, the producers and investors could go out and fourwall a single cinema to test the film in the market-place. If the Odeon Haymarket was booked, and if there should be queues all down Lower Regent Street, Coventry Street, Gerrard Street and back again, the film-

Deal



Simon Perry

maker would be in a very strong position when he went back to attempt to re-negotiate a deal with the distributor who had previously rejected his film. Another bonus is that the film-maker will not have to negotiate extra money at the last moment, and at very disadvantageous terms, to ensure the distribution of a film which might, in the end, turn out to make a profit.

But isn't the position still that unless one of the major distributors takes the film, the chances of it actually making money—as opposed to simply getting on a screen—are not good?

PERRY: That rather depends on what the film costs. We all know the rather rum figures on distributors' grosses for films shown in this country. The average, I think, is about £50,000. There is not a large market in this country, though it's worth remembering that of the 1,500 commercial cinema screens, the independent cinemas control 900. What is interesting to us—and it's really stunning when you consider it—is the lack of readily accessible information on foreign markets. The information exists, of course, but it's locked up in very competitive production and distribution companies. Europe is our nearest market, and yet we seem to know less about distribution there than anywhere else. Australia is definitely a good market; and Japan as well for certain kinds of films.

CRAVEN: There is a slight paradox here. While the home market is not now of great significance financially, it is extremely important to everyone, including the investors, that the indigenous industry should do well at home. We do want to make films that reflect our own culture—something that in the last ten years we've hardly seen. And the paradox is that there are very few British films which have done well internationally which haven't also done well at home. I think from this point of view you might say let's pretend that we actually don't have a domestic market, in order to start from square one and try to build one . . .

So often, an independent film-maker has found some money and made his film and has then gone to a distributor to try to get the film shown. The distributor has said, 'I like your film, but you are asking me to risk £50,000 or £75,000 in terms of prints and advertising. And however much I like your film, if I'm to be put in that position I want to have money

off the top.' This of course is reasonable and one understands that point of view; we went to talk to distributors and wept when we left their offices. But the fact was that the film-maker left the office saying 'I've mortgaged my house, my wife has done this, my uncle has done that, my best friend has done the other, I am mortgaged absolutely to the hilt. And this man wants to put his money in last and take it out first.' Of course this is very disadvantageous to the film-maker, because it makes it difficult for him to justify the situation to his investors. And that, really, is the starting point of all this, the basic problem that got us thinking about the New Deal.

The British film industry is notorious for not giving returns to the people who actually make the pictures. Part of your idea is to attract new investors into films, and to do so by giving them a clearer picture of what is going on . . .

PERRY: We believe this element in the New Deal will be reassuring, particularly to some of the merchant bankers who have had their fingers pretty badly burnt in the past—not through any sort of deliberate fraud, but rather by the system of secrecy and the rather creative approach to accounting which has become traditional in our business. There are films which make money; and at the same time it is possible to make money from films. This isn't limited to the occasional block-busting picture. But one problem we have in Britain is some quite wrong notions of the scale on which feature films should be made; it's one of the legacies of the Americans that we believe films cost far more than they really should. The other day I spoke to a director whose name I won't mention. He has made a few feature films recently, and I asked him about the picture he was planning and he told me that it was going to cost £6m. I said: 'What market is it aimed at?' He replied: 'The world.' So I said: 'But the story doesn't seem to be tremendously appropriate for large American distribution.' To which he said: 'Well, it's just a fact of life that, if you make a film for less than that sort of money, you don't have a film with international appeal.' I don't believe that's true; I believe, in fact, that this approach is precisely the one that is distorting the ideas of our new producers.

Surely it isn't necessarily always the film-maker who thinks this, but it may be the film-

maker plus his agent. What has happened in the past has been that film-makers have tried to get together, to set up joint financing ventures and to work on more modest budgets. But they have tended to end up taking their more attractive projects to the American distributors and making them on an American scale. Won't that happen again?

CRAVEN: Up to now, there has never been a comprehensive structure—as opposed to the odd deal—which independent, creative film-makers could turn to and, most importantly, examine thoroughly. One has to anticipate, in the hope that offered such a structure film-makers might pick it up. Another factor in favour of the New Deal is that it offers a tax incentive: if a director or a major actor—an actor especially—has made a great deal of money one year, he may decide to do a New Deal picture which actually limits his salary. I think that most of the British directors who are working in America would like to find a way of working here again—quite apart from the twenty or thirty other film-makers who have not been working, because the industry which we now have in Britain has not encouraged them to make low budget films in the way that they have been made in Europe. It's not easy for a film-maker of international status to go to Warner Brothers and tell them that he wants to make a film for £300,000. In any case it doesn't make sense. If you want to go to Warner Brothers, why don't you make it for £3m?

PERRY: We approached three major British directors with a scheme for a specific New Deal project. Two replied. John Schlesinger was unavailable, having after a long struggle received the money to make *Yanks*. He did remark, however, that he wasn't really interested in making pictures on a limited budget but preferred the latitude and creative possibilities of a larger production.

CRAVEN: I must interrupt. We heard through the grapevine that he wasn't interested, but in his letter he was more sympathetic to the idea of working on a project with a limited budget.

PERRY: John Boorman, on the other hand, was very interested. I asked whether he would entertain the idea of making a picture in Britain or Ireland—though preferably in Britain—to a budget of perhaps no more than £400,000. He said that the size of the budget was his last consideration. He had

made pictures for all kinds of prices, and he didn't feel that the price really made that much difference to the creative process.

Even now, there are some precedents. We don't yet know how well *The Shout* will do commercially, but *Black Joy* has done very well and that was made for under £200,000. We are not looking for the prestige name directors specifically, although these names will clearly help to reassure investors. Our first portfolio of films—four or five at least, with an overall budget of not more than £2m—should be compiled by the autumn. It will, we think, necessarily be an up-market package, though ultimately our intention is that each portfolio should be a mixture, with the idea of proving the more off-beat subject.

How does television fit into the picture?

CRAVEN: It will be up to individual companies to establish their own relations with the television concerns. As far as the financing and distribution of films was concerned, it really wasn't the business of the AIP to become involved with television. But it has always been my burning hope that one could secure television participation which is linked to television advertising and that, at a later stage, this might be linked to theatrical distribution. If television is prepared to put up an advance against sales, there is no reason why a management company would turn this down.

What reactions have you received from the unions?

CRAVEN: There are two problems that worry the unions as far as production is concerned. First, that producers have made agreements with the unions about the payment of technicians and personnel and that these agreements have not always been kept. Second, that production companies have sometimes been here one day and closed down the next day. That's a particular problem for the unions, and from that point of view they often find it easier to work with a major company.

PERRY: What everyone anticipates, of course, is that we are talking about pictures which are going to break the existing agreements, pictures where the manning levels and the salaries are going to be lower than the agreements lay down. But this is not the case. Each film will be negotiated, and there is no reason to suppose that manning levels or conditions of work or rates of pay will be below the standard agreement.

CRAVEN: In industrial relations within the film industry, the fact is that there has never been complete honesty between the producers and the unions. Budget figures have seldom been shown. And part of the New Deal is that budgets should be made open not only to the trustee and management companies but also to the unions, so that they can understand the nature of the film that is being made. Part of the problem for the unions is that they are dealing with all sorts of films: major commercial pictures for American companies, other films which are being made entirely within the union agreements but on much lower budgets, and films made right outside the system by people who are simply scraping two pennies together because they want to make a picture. Bear in mind, too, that there is no basis for a discussion on different kinds of films, because even people working outside the union structure are frightened to be honest.

PERRY: ACTT are obviously going to wait and see what the New Deal actually means and what the AIP negotiator has to say when he sits down at the first pre-production meeting. Alan Sapper asked us at a recent meeting of the Film Industry Council whether it was implicit in the New Deal that the existing BFPA-ACTT agreement was going to be retained, re-negotiated or broken. When we assured him it would be retained, he confined his remarks to welcoming the New Deal as something which might very well cause more British production, more employment for his members and so on. It's a kind of standing off, if you like. You must bear in mind, however, that the members of AIP are, almost to a man, also members of ACTT.

CRAVEN: I'd like to return for a moment to the question of finance. The theatre has always attracted private backers, angels, to invest. But what attracts the investor is the structure of investment and recoupment; it's not the nature of the theatre itself. Because if you put money into a play, it's there as long as the production runs: when it's over, the sets, the costumes, the cast, everyone disbands. The structure of investment and recoupment in the film industry has never seemed so attractive to the private investor, in terms of what you are actually putting your money into. But because of all the other ways of showing films—discs, cassettes and so on—the investment can now have a life which is as long as the negative of the picture survives. This gives films an advantage over the theatre. And I'm hoping that the New Deal set up may attract investors who might be aiming at a short-term profit, over eighteen months or two years, but who perhaps would also like the idea of an investment which could go on bringing them in a little money for the rest of their lives.

PERRY: Michael White is one of the few who have transferred the notion of angels to the cinema, and he claims that all his films have covered their costs. To give a practical example of what an investor in a New Deal film might possibly expect: a playwright I know has had two plays on tour; he was paid a reasonable fee when the plays were originally put into production and in addition he now receives seven per cent of the gross whenever the play is put on. For the ten to thirteen weeks that one of the plays has been going round the country he has never received less than £200 a week. This is really extraordinary. I mean these are plays with one well-known and one lesser-known TV star, like any standard road show. And this is likely to go on whenever the play is put on. Now, transfer this idea to a New Deal film and the investment becomes very attractive.

We have been talking about private money, but what about public money? Do you think we are soon going to have a British Film Authority and that it will make a significant difference?

CRAVEN: I don't for a moment believe that the BFA Bill will come through before November and, depending on the results of the possible election, it may not come through before the summer of 1979. We shall be very lucky if we see the Authority actually in existence before 1 January 1980. It should make a great difference in a number of areas, even if it doesn't have the kind of teeth that we would like it to have: namely that it should be involved with film marketing and distribution. But in this country we lack a

national presentation of ourselves, whether at festivals or elsewhere. People arrive in Britain and they simply don't know where to go for information. So there is a promotional aspect, and a lot to be done in the provision of information. On the financial side, I think the NFFC is no longer supportable within the present industry, and that also needs to be rethought.

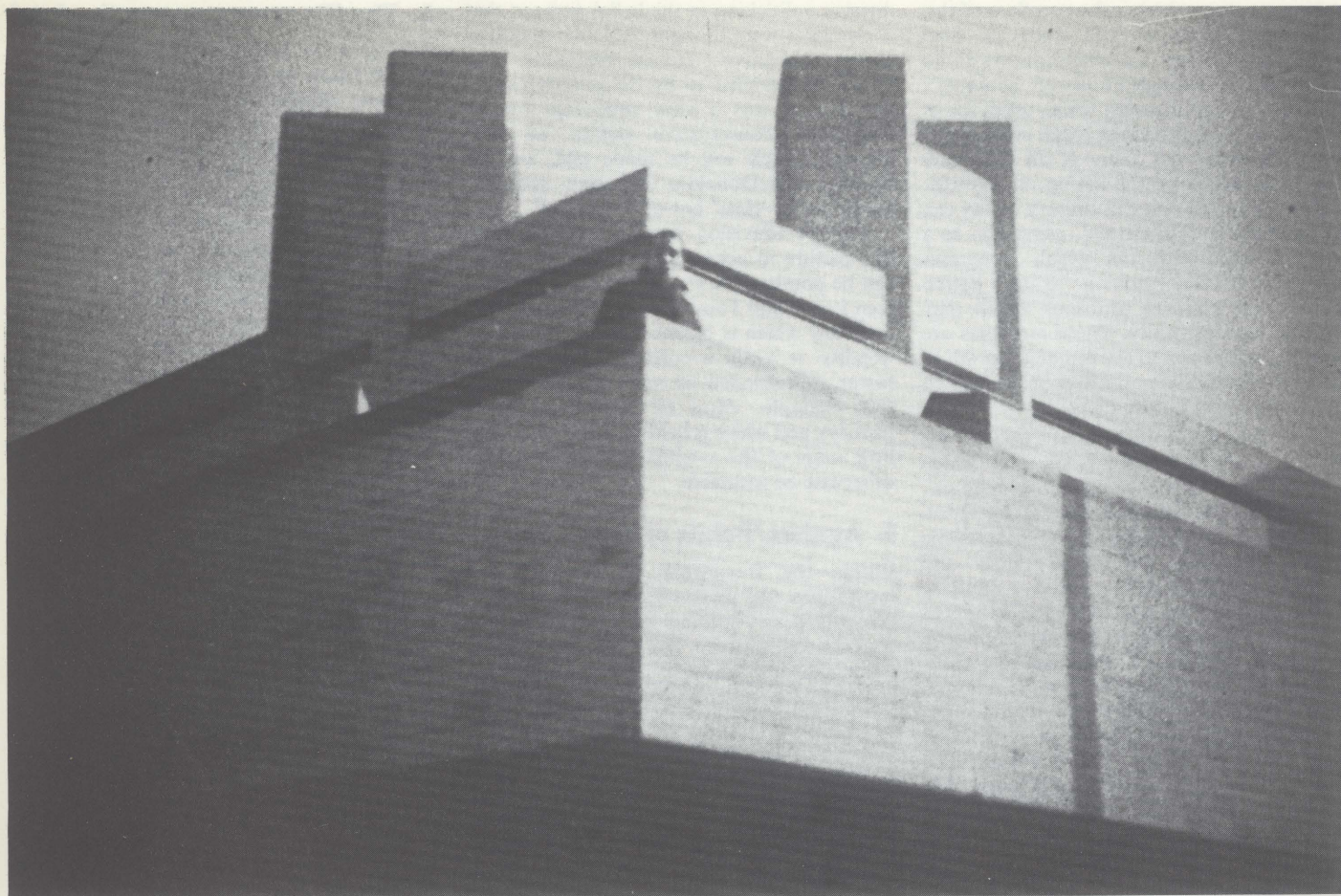
The fact that the marketing aspect wasn't emphasised more in the Interim Action Committee Report of last January worried me, because it didn't seem to me that it showed a realistic approach to the problem. Two years ago, the NFFC could be justified in saying that since it only had £178,000 to invest, it couldn't get involved in a marketing operation. If one doesn't have the films, one can't justify the marketing expenses. But if the NFFC receives £5m in the next few months as a result of the forthcoming bill, then we would put as much pressure on them as we could for the establishment of a marketing division. There is no one in the Corporation who has any direct experience of the industry: not one film-maker, not one editor, not one distributor.

What about the need to rethink the Eady levy?

CRAVEN: Eady isn't doing its job. Regardless of the Treaty of Rome, there are many reasons for being dissatisfied with the way it works. First, the whole market has changed since Eady was introduced in 1950. We no longer have general distribution of a large number of successful films. So in the past seven years or so, Eady has been going increasingly to support the few films that are already very successful. Some people are critical when they suggest that up to 40 per cent of Eady Money is leaving the country. That actually is defensible: if the Americans are going to spend £6m making pictures here, why shouldn't they take £500,000 out of Eady? But the point is that this isn't the purpose of Eady: the purpose is to put money back into British production.

PERRY: The New Deal could, we hope, help to reroute Eady down the right track without the need for legislation, because of the obligatory assignment of funds into production. Obligatory in the sense that we have created our own little law, ensuring that the money can't be used in any other way. As to the British Film Authority in general, we could say that in a sense FIFM was born out of frustration with the BFA. We welcome the idea of the BFA, but we simply can't wait that long. FIFM and the whole New Deal concept is, if you like, digging our own plot of land and growing our own carrots.

CRAVEN: Over the last ten years, it is very difficult to identify even as many as a dozen films which constitute a national cinema. I think it really is the duty of the director, the writer and the producer to turn his attention to those things in our society which are vital and to explore them in the cinema just as the American industry does. And that is something we just haven't seen lately. One can look at Ealing and see how we could laugh at ourselves in that period; one can look at the brief period in the 60s which produced the last crop of films that were recognisably British. We have to get back to a cinema that gives us a view of ourselves. And I don't think there is much difficulty in recognising that in the script. ■



Wyeth and Macpherson's 'The Third Front'

The Third Front

Peter Wyeth and Don Macpherson

Erwin Piscator was a theatre director in the Berlin of the 1920s. He worked with Brecht, Weill, Grosz, Heartfield, Eisler and others to develop a 'Political Theatre' involving notions of the 'epic' and 'documentary', and using film, complex stage machinery, projected texts, statistics, commentators on the action, etc.—devices now familiar in modern theatre—to expand the potential of the stage to deal with contemporary social and political issues in a manner appropriate to the age of mass media.

This article tries to do two things: first, to provide a critical perspective on the 'documentary' tradition from Grierson to present-day television; and secondly, in the light of that perspective, to explain why as independent film-makers we choose to make a 'documentary' on Piscator.*

1. The Grierson Tradition

Documentary film in Britain can be said to have had its self-conscious beginning with Grierson's *Drifters* in 1929. At the time the country was in a profound social and economic crisis, contingent upon a worldwide crisis in capitalism. Since the First World War, American films had dominated British screens, but it was not until the late 20s that cinema was recognised to be important not only as an industry but as a means of ideological propaganda. British cinema therefore lacked an authentic British voice, and in its films Britain was no longer able to

represent itself to the world as an imperial power. The American commercial success was mirrored by the critical success, among both the intelligentsia and the workers' movement, of the new Soviet cinema, despite the fact that the Russian films were widely banned.

How then could Britain portray itself favourably to the world through its cinema? The first response to this question is found with the combination in *Drifters* of Soviet-style montage with the emergence on the screen of 'the British working man'. Grierson exploited this opportunity to 'provide a British voice' among those institutional and governmental authorities which could supply the material basis for the articulation of such a voice. This was manifested in the subsid-

ising of film production and distribution by the Empire Marketing Board and the GPO, and in the war years by the Crown Film Unit. The establishment of this tradition meant recognition for Free Cinema in the late 50s, and the continuation of the documentary form in the developing television production of the 50s and 60s. It is not so much a question of the *influence* of this tradition as the fact that it has *set the very terms* in which film-making is thought about in Britain.

2. 'Fact' and 'Fiction'

An example of how the present debate about film-making has been determined by this tradition is the one which arises from the very terms employed: the distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction', 'documentary' and 'drama'. We would argue that this division is, in a number of important senses, a 'necessary' one in Britain, both for the Grierson generation and for the contemporary programme-makers in television involved in recent debates about this issue.

For the Grierson school, there are four main strands which account for this division. First, a philosophical tradition of positivism centred on 'observable facts' as the basis of knowledge (a major current in 20th century British academic philosophy); secondly, a conservative romantic notion of creativity

**The Third Front*, a 'documentary on the arts' funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain (16mm, approximately 35 minutes, 1978).

and imagination which is the corollary of this fact-centred tradition and finds its dual expression in Grierson's famous phrase about 'the creative interpretation of actuality'; thirdly, a notion of reality which takes for its unit 'the nation' as against social classes, and which assumes that there is an 'objective reality' perceived by the nation as a whole; fourthly, the idea that this unitary reality can be explained to 'the citizen', using film as a kind of political forum which recognises certain problems common to the nation rather than sectional problems which may threaten national unity. These problems are posed as being open to all men of good will to solve, rather than as political problems which are by their very nature divisive.

The division of 'fact' and 'fiction' for contemporary documentary is one which poses reality as the object of 'factual analysis', and 'fiction' as a vehicle for the dramatisation of human relations in (largely) naturalistic modes. The twin notions of 'facts' and 'human relations' both express a unitary aspect—the former related to the nation as exemplified above, the latter in identifying the units as 'individuals' in transcendental problems of 'human nature' as against material situations in concrete historical periods. The achievement of both these poles is to expel their common factor—the political. The 'nation' is above divisive politics; the 'individual' is beyond political measures.

In television, the division between 'fact' and 'fiction' was established early on in the departmental organisation reflecting it—'documentary' and 'drama'. The contemporary crisis of representation, which finds expression in the arguments about 'dramatised documentary' and 'documentary drama', may be seen as a result of bureaucratic development, and the consequent clash over budgetary allocations. Ironically, there is an attempt at philosophical justification by reference to the founding terms of 'documentary' and its otherness from 'fiction'. The philosophical conservatism underpinning the Griersonian tradition finds new life in the bureaucratic conservatism of the television organisation.

3. Point of View

The arguments of the 'professional' programme-makers and television administrators do, however, represent a development from the unitary ideas of 'nation' and 'individual'. The documentary tradition of the 30s addressed itself to the 'democracy of reality'—a conception that reality is 'out there', for the citizen to apprehend by being shown aspects of it in the form of social problems. Although the more radical films, such as *Housing Problems*, began to show issues in class terms (the housing problems of the working class), the general perspective of these films (and Jennings is typical in this respect, if not in others) was that these were national problems to be solved by the national government. The benevolent state became the target of such appeals.

The documentary film-maker was therefore a radical who drew attention to social problems, while posing their solution in terms of the national responsibility of a democracy. The film-maker's status was that of a scientist observing facts and of a poet interpreting that reality creatively. The movement avoided

divisive politicking in the belief perhaps that if problems were brought to public attention by an 'objective', factual treatment they would be attended to by the government of the day. It was a view supported by the traditional conservative notion of 'two nations' which will be made one, and by Ramsay MacDonald's idea that socialists speak not of 'class' but of 'the social'.

Today's television practice diverges from this picture in accepting the idea that there can be points of view; that, say, the work of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett represents only one view which is balanced by many others. 'Reality' is again a concept which may be better apprehended by many points of view (for example, *Days of Hope* concerning history), and which is held by some to reveal a little more of this overall reality than would otherwise be available.

4. Against 'Points of View'

Within the framework of the television institutions, the work of Loach and Garnett constitutes an 'extreme' point of view. The connections between the aesthetic sense of point of view and its political sense are complex. Aesthetically, 'point of view' refers to the articulation of a coherent fictional space by means of the camera's field of vision; politically, it refers to one perspective among many, whose dominance can be assured precisely because of weight of numbers. The two meanings are only 'equivalent' by a theoretical sleight of hand. However, for the purposes of our argument, it is only necessary to stress the process of challenging the status of either meaning as 'natural'.

We would argue that the point of view expressed by a Loach or a Garnett is not simply part of an overall reality and therefore a partial view of an invisible whole, but a view that is a reality in itself. Conversely, there is no reality other than the representations of it which are made available. The whole question of representing 'reality' is a political one, because the way we see and understand the world is conditioned by the way we are shown it. The competition between different ways of representing 'reality' is a political dispute because of the different groups in society. For Garnett and Loach, to show the 'working class point of view' is to attempt to redress the balance: therefore, if the working class are defined as 65 per cent of the 'citizens', then unless 65 per cent of television programmes show the world from their viewpoint, there is undue bias.

Our argument is a little different. We feel that to emphasise the construction of 'reality' by the play of representations, it becomes necessary to work outside the aesthetic mode of naturalism. Television has adopted naturalism as its dominant mode of representation precisely because, with broadcasting as a matter of social responsibility, naturalism focuses on a single reality for which there only exist different 'extremes' of points of view.

At the present time, it appears that television will not screen work outside the naturalistic mode, on the grounds that it lacks appeal to a 'mass audience'—an appeal to the absent will of the democratic majority. Such work can only proceed at the moment in Britain within the context of Independent Cinema. And it is for that very reason that this kind of cinema is constantly under threat.

5. The 'Documentary on the Arts'

Analogous with the 'reality' of the 'social' documentary is the true picture of the aesthetic development of the artist in a documentary on the arts. 'Aesthetic development' is the privileged notion to which the arts documentary is required to provide access. In *The Third Front*, we refuse to privilege the notion of aesthetic development out of its context—the social, economic, political and ideological elements which cut across it. 'Piscator' at the end of the film is in an important sense a 'product' of these various traversing discourses. His theatre is seen in the context of events and ideas which influence and determine the direction of his work—but by no means solely aesthetic ones.

Implicit here is a rejection of the notion of individual genius, which is replaced by the conjunctural play of forces around the 'aesthetic question'. The 'reality' of the art documentary, then, exists for us in the comprehensiveness with which these limiting discourses are represented in the play of forces which produce the 'artist'. It has been conventional practice to ignore such forces as irrelevant. But in films like Ed Bennett's *Hogarth* (1977), and in our film on Piscator, questions of aesthetic development are regarded as insufficient.

6. Why Piscator?

Our interest in Piscator is twofold. First as an example of an historical instance of the attempt to develop a political theatre, in Weimar Germany between 1919 and 1931; and secondly as a parable for our times in the relevance of this experience for those attempting to develop critical artistic practices in, for example, theatre and independent cinema in Britain today.

The immediate links we saw were, first, the relation between Piscator's concept—in the German tradition following Schiller—of the stage as a moral institution, and the development in Britain of 'political theatre' (a term first coined by Piscator) as a reaction against our dominant theatre tradition; and secondly, the lessons for an emerging British Independent Cinema in the economic, political, aesthetic and ideological experiments of Piscator's work in the 20s. Clearly the two are related, and our interest lay in viewing the first of these points (a decade of political theatre in Britain) in the light of the second (the growth of British independent cinema). Although we had no intention of dealing with political theatre in Britain as such, our interest lay in the common problems faced by these two areas of representation.

Piscator's 'political theatre' reacted against naturalism on the ground that it described conditions, prompting individual 'cries of exasperation' without providing an analysis of society which would begin to challenge the basic reasons for the existence of those conditions. Instead, the 'epic', 'political' and 'documentary' theatre proposed to 'break out of the four walls of domestic drama, away from individual psychology to the play of forces in world politics'. However, it is less the specific results which the individual 'Piscator' achieved than the method, and the process, that interested us. This involved the political theatre setting its face against 'art' as an autonomous mode, and opting for a

practice of representation which used film, projected texts, statistics, banners, 'epic' acting (representations of political forces rather than individual characters) and whatever other media could be employed. The 'epic', for Piscator, was concerned with politics rather than with domestic drama.

7. Independent Cinema

How does this relate to Independent Cinema? If Independent Cinema is seen in relation to the film industry, in the way that political theatre in Britain relates to West End theatre, and if we look at the non-film industry traditions in British cinema, then the key term here is 'documentary'. The documentary tradition referred to above has come to be seen as *the* British contribution to the cinema, and also as in some sense in opposition to the fiction/entertainment film industry.

But whereas documentary has consistently employed a naturalistic mode of representation, Piscator's theatre poses a different and opposed conception of 'documentary'. This conception is central to the continuing debate in critical aesthetics in this century, ranging from the debate in Russia over the 'played' and 'unplayed' film in the 20s, through the German aesthetic debates of the 30s, to the development of 'semiotics' in the 60s and 70s. Therefore, in making a film 'about' Piscator, we are also making a polemical call for an extension of the debate about documentary, which involves both an appraisal of the strategies appropriate to a political theatre in a Western social democracy, and an implicit critique of the parameters within which the documentary film is conceived.

8. The Film

The Third Front is a chronological account of Piscator's career from the First World War to 1931. There are two actors, one playing 'Piscator' and the other playing the 'narrator'. The notion of 'performance' overrides considerations of character in a way which is hostile to the traditions of British theatre. The 'narrator' at one time plays 'Piscator', at another the playwright Ehm Welk, at one time plays 'the Lawyer', and at another reverts to playing the 'narrator'. 'Piscator' recites in the first person from 'his' book *Das politische Theater*, and later refers to Piscator as 'he'. The fictional space represented on screen is articulated by the 'look' of the actors, which at times is used to puncture conventional fictional coherence by direct address to the spectator: '... me, the third partner in the audience.' 'Piscator', that is the words of the historical person Piscator performed by either actor, looks off-screen left, the narrator off-screen right.

In *History Lessons*, Straub uses a young man in modern dress as the recipient of the words spoken by the Banker (who wears the clothes of 'his' period, Caesar's Rome). We decided to use the 'look' of the actors to address an 'absent' audience off-screen. This strategy is doubled (when the film uses theatre locations) in the use of camera angles and positions from 'the stalls', 'the circle', 'the boxes' and so on. We have attempted, therefore, to break open the diegetically motivated articulation of look retained from classical cinematic usage in *History Lessons*



'The Third Front': Above: Straubian echo in a London location. Below: political theatre

by means of an appropriate foregrounding of 'performance' in a theatrical context. The 'narrator' is for us an actor, a performer, in the world delineated by the frame, which implies that to pretend otherwise is a pretence dictated by dubious convention.

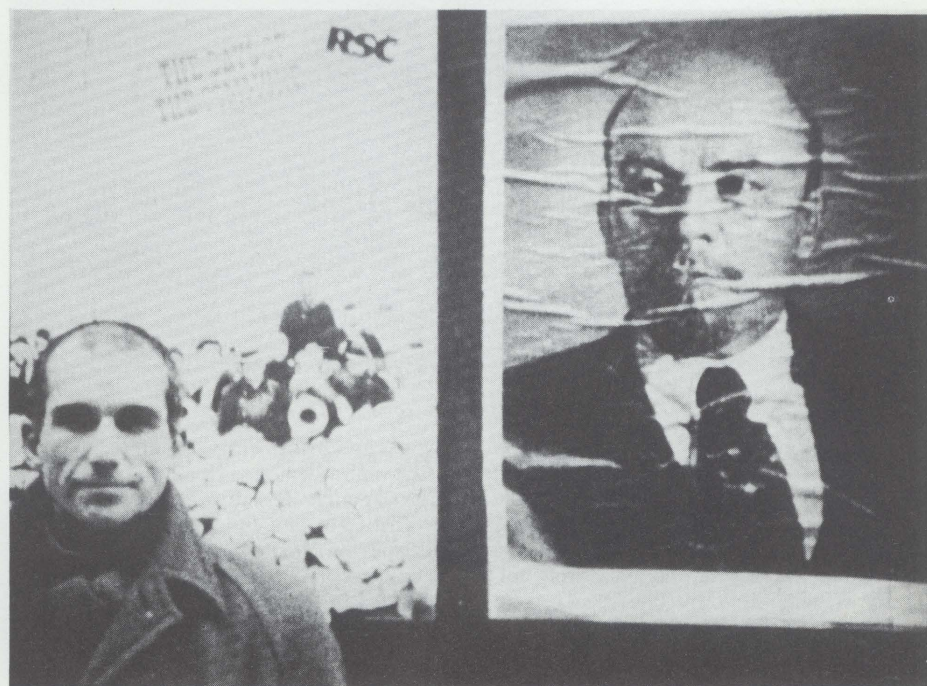
The idea of the 'epic' is introduced in the use of locations, of sound and of diegetic time. The film's setting is neither a 'documentary reconstruction' nor a 'fictional recreation': Piscator is seen and heard in present-day London, in exteriors using the everyday background sounds against the performance of the text. The 'narrator' is likewise in present-day London, but in theatres addressing the various auditoria. This should establish the links between the historical period referred to, and the continuity of the problems which make up the substance of the text.

Sound is used not to illustrate the images but as a separate element. The soundtrack utilises sound perspective (echo and its

'absence') and ambient location noise (traffic, etc.) to establish the different spaces of 'the world' and 'the theatre' on camera and in voice-over. The time of the film is at once chronological (1919 to 1931) and 'epic', in that chronology is subordinated to the development of the aesthetic, political, economic and ideological arguments. (An anecdote performed by the actor 'Piscator' dates from 1963, but relates to the play *Russia's Day* from 1920 and is consecutive to it in the time of the film.)

The texts spoken in the film are not concerned with proving the genius of Piscator, nor principally with descriptions of his work. They are chosen to represent those forces within Weimar Germany at the time of the 'Political theatre' which interlocked with the aesthetic discourse. Thus the war, the 1919 revolution, criticism by the Communist paper *The Red Flag*, the economic depressions and constraints of a commercial

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Skolimowski's Cricket Match

Philip Strick



'The Shout': Alan Bates and John Hurt

Nothing more English, surely, than cricket on the green. A summer afternoon of moderate competition, speculatively observed by a dairy herd and distantly overlooked, above the arena of trees, by the gaunt spire of the local church. In the little wheeled scoring hut, a story is being told by one spectator to another. Apart from the harsh cries of a peacock, the mood seems tranquil. By the end of the day, three men will have died.

This year's British entry at Cannes was, for the first time anyone can recall, the account of a cricket match. Based on a Robert Graves story written in 1926, set among the sweeping landscapes of North Devon and performed by a cast of true-blue reliables including Alan Bates, Susannah York, John Hurt and Robert Stephens, *The Shout* would seem at first hearing to be one of those elegant export dramas which, since the Forsytes, the British

have discovered they do so well. The difference in this case is that it was directed by Jerzy Skolimowski, whose first films in Poland in the 60s showed a talent as wild if not as brutal as that of fellow film school student Polanski, and whose subsequent European work has ranged from the picaresque to the unfortunate, embracing at least one acclaimed success, *Deep End*, on the way.

Bounding back from a period of apparent inaction, Skolimowski has tuned into *The Shout* with ease and ingenuity. As with *Deep End*, he preserves the accents and accidents of the national character with unarguable authenticity and then proceeds to undermine it at every turn: the cricket match involves members of the local insane asylum, whose behaviour, while seldom totally disruptive, seems to infect the whole event with dislocations and non sequiturs as their spokesman, Alan Bates, talks of a man with the power to kill with his own voice. The film wanders from the game to the story and back; both seem impossible and both, in due course, seem real. Stunningly shot by Mike Molloy (who formerly worked with Roeg on *Performance* and *Walkabout*, and with Kubrick on *Clockwork Orange* and *Barry Lyndon*), it's an encounter with the cumulatively unexpected, a film of implications which, again like *Deep End*, never quite seem to be resolved. In his story, Bates invades the home of John Hurt, fascinates him with a demonstration of the 'death shout', gains arrogant control over his wife (Susannah York), and is finally carted off by the police. At the cricket match, perhaps, the shout will be heard again.

I met Skolimowski in London shortly after he had seen *Star Wars* from, as he put it, several seats at once (he likes to see a film from all angles). His English, too, tended to wander, although the restless pugilist one associated with *Walkover* has calmed down into a relaxed and genial theorist. If he was not to be drawn on the subject of *King, Queen, Knave*, and even less on the occasional brush with the authorities in the days of *Hands Up*, he had certainly not exhausted the topic of having created *The Shout* at high speed during a perfect English summer. 'With *The Shout*, somebody gave me the nicest toy a grown-up can play with. It was the most untroubled film I ever worked on—not the slightest change was suggested by the producers. And it's a 99 per cent British film. Plus me.'

What attracted you to the story?

SKOLIMOWSKI: The ambiguity, and the sense of the absurd. I think we are surrounded by ambiguity; double meanings can be seen in everything. Remember, I started as a poet, I published three books of poetry, my mind was trained along the path of poetic associations. So I'm not afraid to wander away from direct narrative, and I feel safe with a story that tempts you both to believe and to disbelieve. As for absurdity, there again, it is all around us—I'm just exploring my own recognitions of whatever one can get in touch with. Who's more absurd: Bates, or the world around him? Is he a mental patient because he is not normal? How do you tell whether a tree is 'normal' or not?

Did you make many changes to the text?

The first development of the script was by Michael Austin, and I liked this first draft

enough to drop everything else. Then I worked on it for three weeks in between casting and location hunting, and wrote my own version. In the Graves story it's not a duel between two men, it's just the account of a man who shouts and kills with the shout. Bang, and that's it. Graves says the husband is a composer, but he doesn't go any further. The film has to show what kind of instruments he uses, so I did put a lot of work into building up that part and I have to take responsibility for the John Hurt character. I also invented the cobbler's wife, the girl the husband is interested in.

Are the aboriginal references part of the original story?

The sharpened death-bone and the soul-stones, yes. I didn't research them. I felt that Robert Graves was sufficient authority! I understand that these same things are part of the story of *The Last Wave*, which I haven't seen. It's an odd coincidence, but it would imply that back in 1926 Graves was right about the aborigines. Maybe he was right about the shout as well.

I know you say that you like to shoot very fast, in effect to create the film as you go along. But to what extent did you improvise *The Shout*? It gives the impression of being very precisely shaped.

I'm surprised at that, because the pattern of working was actually very chaotic. There are some films where one can feel a little bit jealous that one wasn't involved, not necessarily as a director but it would have been nice to be co-author or an actor in a supporting role, or anything. It must have been good to be there; it would have been a great creative atmosphere. I feel that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was like that, and I believe we were able to create this kind of atmosphere during *The Shout*. It wasn't coolly calculated, it erupted like a kind of volcano.

At the same time, your introduction of the 'death shout' itself must have taken careful planning. . .

Yes, this was where I used the Dolby system; it had to be applied just at the right moment so that we would be hearing something special. The shock of the sound is not a question of loudness or richness—it is sudden and it is complex, because the human voice is helped on forty or more tracks by all the things that came into my mind that might be helpful, the Niagara Falls, the launching of the Moon rocket, everything. But over the top is the real human voice of a man shouting like hell.

What makes the shouting sequence so effective is that there are so many surprising camera angles around Bates as he shouts, and the posture he presents is really just as horrifying as the sound itself.

I must say we had the most difficult conditions to shoot this scene, on top of the dunes on a very windy day. I placed Bates facing the wind but leaning over backwards, so that he had to fight against the wind to come forwards, and already the physical effort was pretty strong. We had to stop him with a rail from pushing past the focus point, so all the elements of fight were there. It was very painful for Alan, his mouth was full of sand—but this was a way to achieve something really expressionistic and natural without special effects.

Do you see the Bates figure in a sympathetic light, do you admire what he represents, or do you regard him as an intruder?

Well, obviously I'd prefer not to be the husband. I'd prefer to be the man, Crossley, but I see the negative side of him as well and I show this. He's not a likeable character. So the answer is that none of the characters is closest to me—I try to be a little bit of each one. I both like and dislike them. Even the girl has negative aspects. I hate the way she pushes her husband out so that she can give her full attention to the new man; she is so bloody sure of herself in that role. When somebody's down, you don't kick him.

You start and end the film with the wife, which seems to suggest that she gets the worst of the situation.

The question is, who is the victim, after all? Each of the three loses, but the wife is also the prize for the winner between the two men. In my experience, when people are fighting for women, nothing good comes of it. When I was younger, I used to deal with life much more easily and I would casually interfere with people's lives, and then I realised that these are serious events and the conflicts shouldn't be caused for nothing. Let us treat the film as a warning, that we should be aware of our own goodwill instead of waiting for a Crossley to come along and destroy all around us. I must tell you that the ending I like most in my films is that of *Walkover*. The hero is beaten in the end, but it's his victory. Maybe the husband in *The Shout* fits that pattern.

I was interested that you linked his frame of mind with the Francis Bacon painting.

That was built up gradually. I wasn't very satisfied with the husband's music room as a set—it was too impersonal for my taste, before we put in all those clippings and stuffed animals and other mess. So I started to imagine I'm a composer of modern music. Now, am I a genius or am I just playing at putting accidental sounds together? Here I am, locked in this room, and what do I have? I drink some brandy, I have some pills, I smoke some cigarettes. Now am I inspired only by my work or perhaps some things I see in the paper? Perhaps I would have a book of reproductions. So I went through a book of Bacon paintings; he is one of my favourite painters because his work has the feeling of absurdity, of creatures being twisted and strangled. It's that *movement* in Bacon which links him with the masochism of the composer, who has to go through very painful experiences in his work.

This is the kind of man who even if he made a lot of money would probably be very unhappy thinking he is just successfully selling awful stuff. He's a man of desperation, and he responds to the Bacon painting of the crippled figure, the white one on the black background. He cut it out and hung it up without knowing why. By that act, wasn't he already creating some bridge between himself and what is to follow? To me, the natural poetic association is that Rachel, the object of his uncertainty, will copy, unwillingly of course and without knowing why, the image of what he already has. In a way, he is provoking what follows, because he is emanating certain things, he is broadcasting certain waves. Dealing with sound as he does, he becomes something that has to be treated

in terms of the same method.

How does he find the soul-stones?

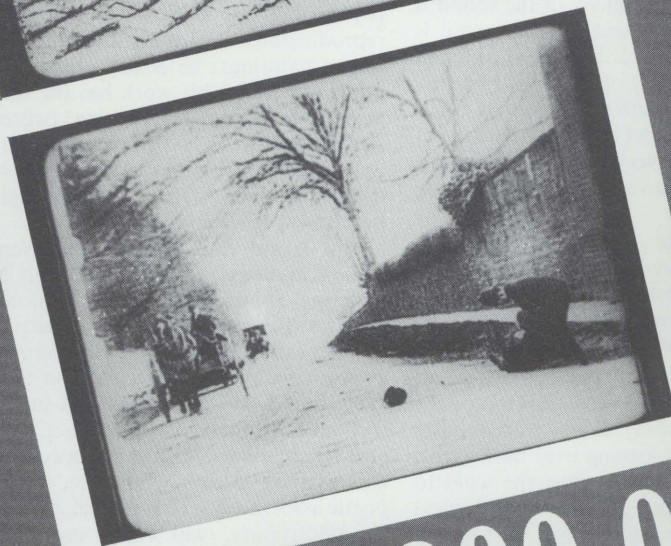
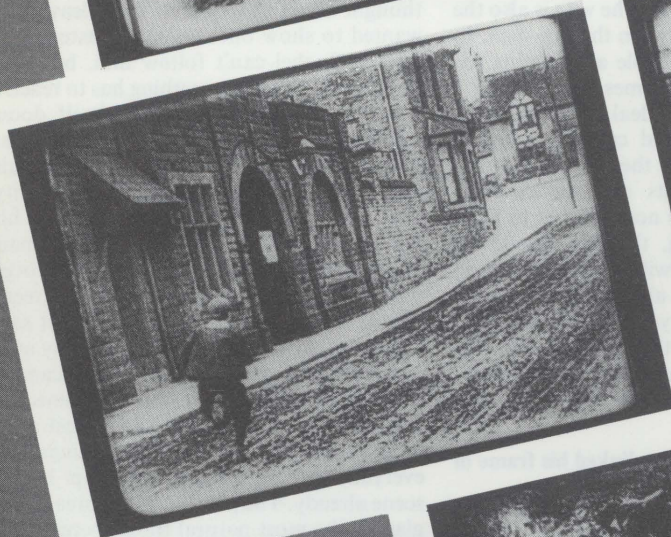
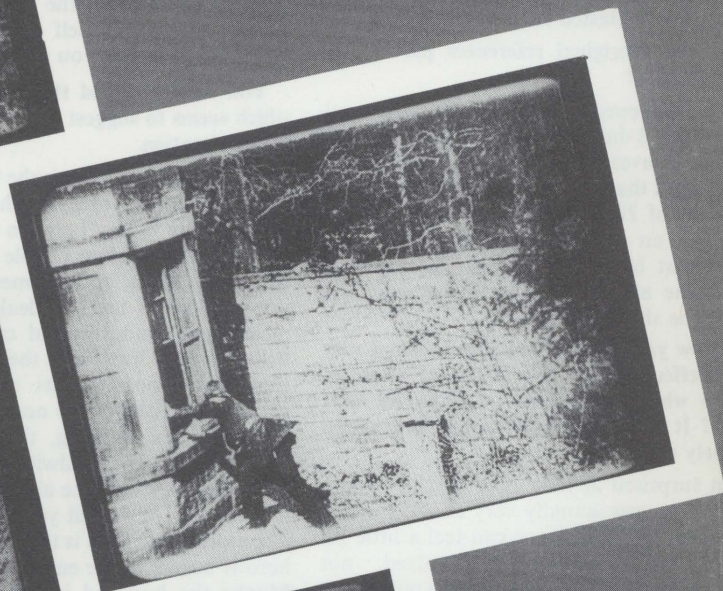
To me this was the most fairytale element in the whole story, it was the most ambiguous thing. I didn't understand it too well originally, but I found the way to make it believable that a soul could be hidden in a stone: the madman himself believes it! So if he has been able to convince us that the 'death shout' can be true we won't question the stones too much.

Some critics have said that you're concerned about waste, and you certainly have plenty of instances of breakage in *The Shout*—the spilt milk, the splashed paint, the broken window and so on.

The milk bottle knocked over by the dog, I'm very pleased with that. It was the most natural thing, it was real. It's there because I thought about the scene of Bates leaving and wanted to show once again the extent of his power. Rachel can't follow him, but something should show, something has to react. So I sent the dog. But the milk itself doesn't mean a thing. It's a totally natural event, and I just rearranged it a little. As for the paint, yes, I really like that. It has the absurdity I like. The police inspector's legs won't hold him and he collapses among the cans of paint. What would be the best colour to pour over a dark uniform? This incredible light green. I like it, it's a touch of painting, I must say. I think the key to it is that I'm not fully aware of the effects I'm using, but I think I can cope with the natural environment of a scene. I can use whatever is naturally there to get a little more expression. The hidden meanings of the everyday are prompted by whatever is in the scene already. The piece of wood breaking the glass is the most natural thing, because he is chopping wood in a fury and the result has at least to be the smashing of a window. It's logical, and emotionally it's right.

After *The Shout*, do you feel that the only way for you to make films you can be interested in is to make them anywhere but Poland, or do you still feel Polish?

The easiest answer, and probably the most truthful, is that I don't make plans. Fortunately I don't need to. I'm in the comfortable position of being able to go home and I can stay there for months and not be nervous about my next job. Poland is the most peaceful place in the world for me, and I can keep busy with many things, creative, and family life. And when I find the need to do something, I take whatever is there on hand. Because I believe that making films is a kind of therapy for the film-maker, a chance to treat it almost as a diary, written not about your own life but about things as they are for you at that moment. It answers the need to express the private self by spontaneous public acts. When I am ready to tell a story about the death of my hero, I can place it in the most modern hotel in Tokyo, where a European will arrive in order to be killed. And instinctively I know that the confrontation will set off my imagination—the Japanese hieroglyphics, for example, will be signs for my hero to read without understanding what they mean. So I can easily picture my next film happening in Tokyo, and I will be ready for it. I'm not ready yet, but I know that there is a possibility on the horizon. It is coming closer and closer, but there's no need to rush it.



Barry Salt

FILM FORM

1900-06

The 1978 annual conference of the International Federation of Film Archives, held at Brighton in May, has been the occasion for the first complete survey ever made of the surviving fiction films from one period of world production. Even from so remote a period as 1900–06, about 1,500 films are preserved thanks to the efforts of the world's film archives, although several times that many are lost for ever. So although films tended in those years to be very short, about four minutes in length on average, it was necessary to reduce the bulk of the material by selection for presentation at the conference by experts from several countries working on a collaborative basis. I have myself viewed what I believe to be a representative sample of about 700 titles, ignoring in particular the many hundreds of one-scene 'knockabouts' in the Library of Congress Paper Print collection, though not the more interesting dramatic films in that same place. On this basis, I have arrived at a picture of the development in the forms of films during this period which substantially revises the inadequate accounts given in existing film histories.

My overview of the rapid developments in the formal aspects of film in these early years sees some analogies with biological evolution, in the way that novel features which suddenly appear like mutations are sometimes rapidly taken up in other films, forming a line of descent, while on other occasions original devices die out because they have some unsuitability of a technical, commercial or artistic nature. This approach tends to put the emphasis on what most films come to be like, providing a descriptive norm. There are certainly other ways of looking at films from this and other periods, some of which will have been presented at the Brighton conference. For instance, other historians may take quite a different view of what I might loosely call 'evolutionary dead-ends'.

I should remark that although the subject and location of the conference acknowledge that at the beginning of the century the work of British film-makers was important in a way that was not to be the case again for thirty years, it would be futile to try to consider their work in isolation, since film production was already truly international, with complex interconnections between films made in the only significant producing countries: Britain, France and the United States.

Before the Nickelodeon boom and subsequent world-wide increase in film production from 1906 onwards, the pressures on the evolution and development of the forms of film were low. The only absolute demand from audiences was that films be photographed (and printed) sharply in focus and with the correct exposure. Even after 1900, there were still audiences somewhere for just about anything that moved on a screen. Around 1903 there began a definite trend towards longer, multi-scene films, although the number of titles produced did not increase that much. Despite the relative lack of competitive pressure, some cinematic devices were taken up gradually by many film-makers, while others were never repeated after their invention; one instance is a unique handling of parallel action with an inset image within part of the main scene in G.A. Smith's *Santa Claus* of 1898. Another instance that had some influence for only a short while derives from Georges Méliès' way of making shot transitions in *Cendrillon* (1899) and a number of subsequent films.

Left: action moving from shot to shot in the Sheffield Photographic Company's *Daring Daylight Robbery* (1903)

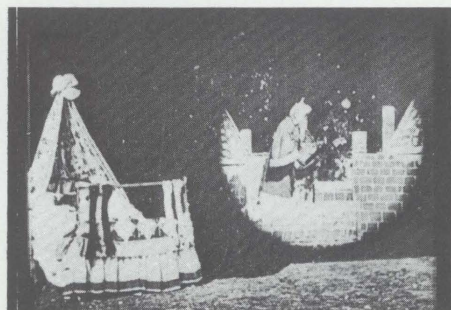
Shot Transitions

When there was no appropriate intertitle to separate successive scenes, Méliès used dissolves rather than cuts from one shot to the next in his early films—examples occur in *Barbe-Bleue* (1901), for instance, and *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902). And despite examples of what was to become the standard approach available in the work of contemporary English film-makers, E.S. Porter and others took up this type of shot transition. The shots in Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* (1902) are all joined by dissolves, even though the film is basically an imitation of James Williamson's *Fire!* (1901), in which all the transitions are made with cuts. And in *Life Rescue at Long Branch*, presumably made by Porter or under his supervision at Edison in 1901, the transition from a Very Long Shot of a beach resuscitation to a closer shot of the same is made with a dissolve.

In *Alice in Wonderland* (Hepworth, 1903) there are a number of transitions of this kind, with dissolves in to a closer shot, and also dissolves when the actress walks out of one shot into the next. This is despite the fact that the position matching from one shot to another is what would come to be considered fairly good many years later. (It must be emphasised that Méliès was *not* using the dissolve to indicate a time lapse between shots: many of the instances occur when there is no time lapse between characters walking out of one shot into a spatially adjoining one. In fact, the use of a dissolve to indicate a time lapse was not established as a convention until the later 1920s.)

The use of fades is extremely rare in the early years of the century; those that occur in *Alice in Wonderland* are probably unsuccessful attempts at making a dissolve in the

G.A. Smith's *'Santa Claus'* (1898): parallel action with an inset image



camera by fading out, then winding back and fading in on the next shot. The earliest cameras did not have accurate footage counters, and a miscounting of the number of turns back with the crank handle could easily replace a dissolve with a fade-out and -in. For this and other obvious reasons, the use of dissolves made in the camera between every shot was not an efficient procedure, and neither was making dissolves in the printer by an equivalent process for every separate print of the film produced. So it is no great surprise that the usage disappeared after 1903.

And it was displaced by J.H. Williamson's creation of action moving from shot to shot cut directly together in *Stop Thief!* and *Fire!* of 1901. The first of these is the source of the subsequent developments in 'chase' films, and has the characters moving out of the first shot into the second set in a different place and joined to the first with a straight cut, moving across that scene towards the camera, and then into the third and final shot. *Fire!* introduces this feature into a more complex construction. In this film an actor moves from a scene outside a burning building by exiting from the side of the frame and into a shot outside a fire station, then the fire cart moves out of this shot into the distant background of a shot of a street, advancing forward and out of the frame past the camera, and then into the original scene outside the burning house, all shots being joined by straight cuts, as are all the subsequent shots of the film. The next shot is of the interior of an upper room of the house, from which an occupant is rescued by a fireman who comes through the window. The next cut to the outside view is on the movement of rescuer and rescued through the window, though the continuity is imperfect, there being half a second of movement missing between the two shots. As with some of G.A. Smith's films, it seems that *Fire!* was modelled on narrative lantern slide sequences previously made by Bamforth on the same subject,* though obviously action continuity of the kind we have in the film was impossible in these.

Another contemporary example of 'outside to inside' cuts with time continuity occurs in *The Kiss in the Tunnel*, probably made for the Bamforth Company about 1900. This film shows a railway train going into a tunnel in Extreme Long Shot, then the next shot shows the interior of a railway carriage compartment, and then finally the train is seen coming out of the tunnel in Very Long Shot.

So far no films repeating the continuous shot to shot movement of Williamson's films are known before 1903 and the appearance of *Daring Daylight Robbery*, made by the Sheffield Photographic Company. This film again has an onlooker moving from the first high angle shot of a burglar breaking into the back of a house into a shot of a street elsewhere in which he alerts the police, and there is then a straight cut back to the original scene. The innovation in this film is that a chase then develops through a series of shots, so combining features of both *Fire!* and *Stop Thief!* into a whole that was one of the most commercially successful of all films made up to that date. *Daring Daylight Robbery* was made available for sale in America by the

*For the work of Bamforth and other Yorkshire film-makers, see Allan Sutherland's article in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1976–77.

Edison Co. under the title *Daylight Burglary*, and it seems fairly certain that Edwin S. Porter had seen it before making his *The Great Train Robbery* several months later.

In some respects *The Great Train Robbery* does represent an elaboration of its model. The most important of these was the addition of what might be called an 'emblematic' shot, which in this case shows a Medium Close Up of a cowboy bandit pointing a gun straight at the camera. This shot, which could be placed at either the beginning or end of the film by the exhibitor, does not represent any action that occurs in the film, but can be considered to indicate its general nature. At any rate, when the device was copied subsequently in many films, this is clearly the way it was used, as in *Raid on a Coiners' Den* (Alfred Collins, 1904), where the first shot shows a Close Up insert of three hands coming into the frame from different directions; one holding a pistol, another with clenched fist, and the third holding a pair of handcuffs. A similar instance occurs in the famous *Rescued by Rover* (Hepworth, 1905), and various other films of these years, and the device continued to occur up to at least 1908, being used in some of Griffith's first films, among others. In a small number of cases the shot comes at the end of the film instead of the beginning. Since the emblematic shot may include characters present in the first true scene of the film narrative, it may not be immediately recognised as such, since it is always a close shot before the inevitable Long Shot framing of the first true scene, but the matter is clinched if there is wild positional mismatching between characters in the two shots and the rest of the film has fair continuity for the period.

The method of overall construction stemming from *Fire!* continued to be applied over and over again in the years after 1903; applied to new versions of the subjects already broached, and without much variation—though one later example has the chase in the middle rather than at the end (*Stolen By Gipsies*, Edwin S. Porter, 1905).

The genre of comedy chase films descending from *Stop Thief!* are invariably simpler in construction than the dramatic films incorporating chases, having a plainer linear movement of the action through shots set in a succession of different places, without cut-backs to an established scene. They too only emerge as a steady stream from 1903 onwards, with such titles as *The Pickpocket—A Chase through London* (Alf Collins, 1903), and most famously and influentially, Biograph's *Personal* of 1904. The descendants of this last include a total plagiarism made at Pathé in 1905, *Dix Femmes pour un Mari*.

Films using the chase construction were all original film subjects, with the possible exception of *The Great Train Robbery*, which may have been based on a stage melodrama of the same name, and they are nearly all without intertitles between the shots. But there was also a category of film adapted from stage or literary works, or even actual events, in which a more complex narrative was handled within several minutes running time by using a narrative or descriptive title before all (or most of) the scenes. This form was established before 1900 in some of Méliès' longer films such as *L'Affaire Dreyfus*, and in the period under consideration it was occasionally combined with the chase after 1904, as in Ferdinand Zecca's

Scenes of Convict Life (1905), where the shots of the chase are cut straight together. This sort of construction obviously leads on to the flexible form that became usual in subsequent years.

It should be mentioned that around half the films surviving from before 1906 consist of just one scene done in one shot, and these are of no interest as far as film construction is concerned.

Directions

Méliès seems fairly quickly to have realised the importance of 'correct' directions of entrances and exits for the smoothness of film continuity, even though he was using dissolves between every shot. Certainly by *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) he was consistently using an exit frame right followed by an entrance frame left, and vice versa, when the characters moved out of one shot into the next set in a different, but neighbouring, location. This was not the case for most other film-makers at this period, though obviously anyone who makes the directions of entrances and exits purely at random without having thought about the matter is going to get them 'right' some of the time, just by chance. Of course it was made slightly easier for Méliès to come to grips with this problem, because he was working in the one place, his studio stage, whereas everyone else making multi-scene films was working in a number of different real locations in the one film, and these locations tended to put some pressures on the way the action in each shot should be staged.

In multi-scene films shot on real locations the transition to the next shot was often cued by movement forwards out past the camera, or conversely, as already established in Williamson's *Fire!*, and in the next shot the actors would be discovered already within the frame in a new location. For this type of transition it is almost immaterial which side of the camera the exit (or entrance) is made. However, if the actors are discovered moving strongly in one direction not too far from the camera in the next shot, it gives smoother continuity (according to subsequent ideas), if they exit in the same direction.

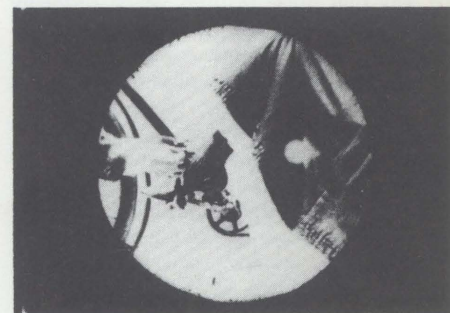
In general in this period one either has a series of shots with axial movement towards the camera from the far distance, or a series of shots with movement into the frame past the camera moving away into the far distance; but the subtler mixed combination of movement out of frame past the camera followed by a shot in the opposite direction with movement into the frame past the camera, as in Haggar's *Desperate Poaching Affray* (1903), is extremely rare.

Scene Dissection

Up to 1900, the only instance of a scene being divided up into a number of shots occurs in G.A. Smith's *Grandma's Reading Glass* (1900), in which the various objects a child looks at with the magnifying glass are shown inside a circular mask as Point Of View (P.O.V.) Big Close Ups. This device was repeated by Smith in *Scenes on Every Floor* (1902) and *As Seen through a Telescope* (1900), with masked vignettes representing the actor's P.O.V. through a keyhole and a telescope respectively. This device was ap-

plied to a slightly more extended narrative in *A Search for Evidence* (Biograph, 1903), in which the series of keyhole-peepings and associated P.O.V. shots lead the wife and detective to a confrontation with her unfaithful husband inside one of the rooms spied on, through a cut on action and change of camera direction of 90 degrees. By the definition of 'scene' being used here, which corresponds to the modern 'script scene' or 'master scene', this last cut described is a transition from one scene to the next.

An interesting example of the evolution of filmic devices through modified plagiarism is provided by Edwin S. Porter's *Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903), which combines, as so often with Porter, features from two or more previous films made by others to give something novel. This film, which shows a shoe salesman taking the opportunity to fondle a female customer's foot in a Big Close Up insert cut into the main scene, derives from *The Little Doctors* for its general



Telescope viewpoint in a French film of 1901

construction, and from a French film of 1901 for its subject. This latter film shows a man with a telescope spying on another man who is taking advantage of helping a woman on to a bicycle to fondle her foot, but in this case an identical Big Close Up is seen inside a circular mask and cut in as a P.O.V. telescope insert.

For the development of cutting to another camera position within the course of a scene, we have to turn back to G.A. Smith's *The Little Doctors* (1901), which was reissued in shortened form as *The Sick Kitten* (1903). In this film there is a cut straight in from a Long Shot of two children administering a spoon of medicine to a kitten to a Big Close Up insert of the kitten with the spoon in its mouth. The position matching across the cut is not exact, but it could be worse for what is the first ever use of this device.

As with other devices, 1903 saw the real beginning of the continuous development of closer shots cut into a scene, and the most remarkable instance occurs in that little known master-work *Mary Jane's Mishap*, again from G.A. Smith. Here there is repeated three times in the course of the first scene cuts in, and then out again, from a Long Shot of Mary Jane lighting the fire to a Medium Close Shot of her, admittedly with poor position matching. The use of the device begins to proliferate in 1904 with Medium Shots cut into scenes in *The Strenuous Life* (Edison) and *The Widow and the Only Man* (Biograph), and then becomes quite common from 1905 onwards in films too numerous to catalogue from France, Britain and the USA, though we might mention *La Calza* (Pathé, 1905), *Modern Brigandage* (Pathé, 1906), *The Firebug* (Biograph, 1905), *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Edison, 1906), *Eine Fliegenjagd* (Skladanowski, 1905) amongst many.

It really becomes necessary to distinguish at this point between the true Close Up and the insert, which I define, following later nomenclature, as a close shot of some object or part of an actor's body *other than the face*. This distinction seems to have been made in practice at the time, for there were studios such as Vitagraph where the insert was used from 1905 onwards, but not the true Close Up or Medium Close Shot. The use of a close shot of a letter or other text at the point where it is written or read obviously makes a vast difference to the possibilities of film narrative, and early examples include the tombstone inscription in *Mary Jane's Mishap*, a cut to a Close Up of a notice on a gate in *The Watch Dogs* (Pathé, 1904) and insert shots of documents in *Buy Your Own Cherries* (R.W. Paul, 1904) and *Honest Peggy* (Pathé, ca. 1905). Inserts to show clearly details important to the story are used repeatedly in *The Missing Legacy* (Alf Collins, 1906) and *Falsely Accused* (probably

There was in fact no consolidated development in the use of cutting to different angles within a scene before 1906, unlike the case of cutting in to a closer shot, but for the sake of completeness I should also mention a true pair of reverse angles from pursuing car to pursued, and vice versa, in *The Runaway Match*, made by Alf Collins in 1903. There are also a number of cuts to the other side of a wall in comedy chases, for instance the French film *Wet Paint* of about 1905.

Other Forms of Transition

The already mentioned *Mary Jane's Mishap* includes a remarkable and quite unique pair of vertical wipes to effect the transition into and out of a closer shot of the inscription on her tombstone. And there are a few occasions when fades were used intentionally in the years between 1900 and 1906, one fairly trivial instance being their use to begin and end each of the one-shot scenes in *La Vie du Christ*, made by Jasset and Hatot for Gaumont in 1906. In this case every scene is preceded by a narrative title put in between the fades. Much more interestingly, in *The Old Chorister* (1905), scenes are joined directly by a fade-out and a fade-in, and in another case by an iris-out and a fade-in.

Another unique occurrence in these years is the use of a focus-pull to give an out-of-focus blur on a Medium Shot of a man kissing a beautiful woman, then a cut to another out-of-focus blur which pulls in to a Medium Shot of the same man in bed kissing his ugly wife, from whom he recoils when he realises that he has been dreaming. The film is *Let Me Dream Again* (1900) by G.A. Smith, but there were to be no other examples of this device for a couple of decades, transitions in and out of dreams being done with dissolves from Zecca's Pathé remake of this film as *Rêve et Réalité* (1902) onwards to *And the Villain Still Pursued Her* (Vitagraph, 1906).

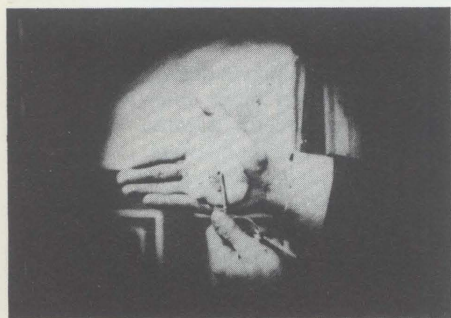
Cross-Cutting Between Parallel Actions

As has already been described, the practice of cutting away for one shot from the enclosing scene was quite well established by the end of these years, but the idea of doing this repeatedly was not. A preliminary stage of this latter development may be visible in a few films in which the shots alternate repeatedly between aerial events and happenings on the ground. One example occurs in *Rescued in Mid-Air* (Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, ca. 1906).

But, most remarkably, fully developed cross-cutting appears in a race against time situation in *The Hundred-To-One Shot* (Vitagraph, 1906), with repeated cuts between a speeding car and events at its destination. This seems to be the beginning of a development that continued through 1907 into 1908, and for which D.W. Griffith incorrectly claimed credit.

Dreams, Memories, Visions

The first way that dream memories were treated was as a separate scene inset within

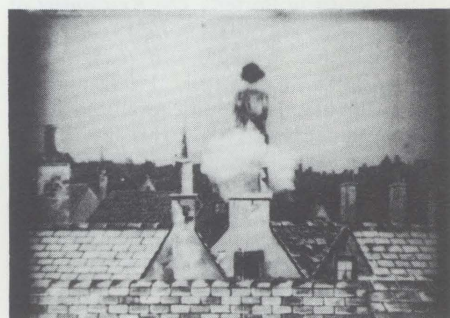
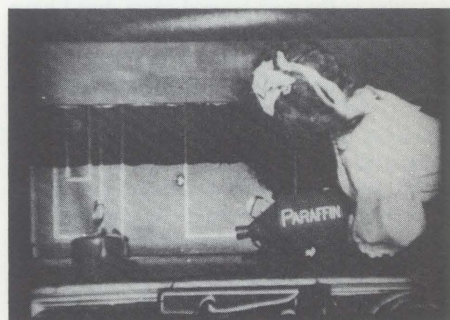
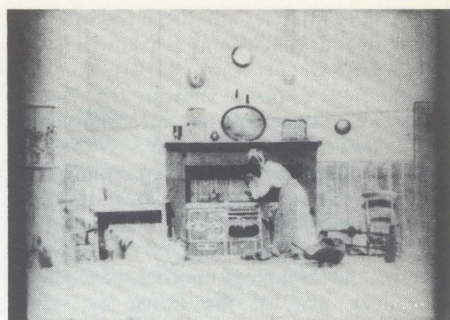


Insert detail in 'Falsely Accused' (Hepworth, 1905)

Hepworth, 1905), and from this point on we can consider the usage well-established.

The earliest cut within a scene *without* any real change of scale or closeness of shot, and with strict time continuity, occurs in *Ladies Skirts Nailed to a Fence* (Bamforth, 1900), in which the second shot is taken at 180 degrees to the first from the other side of the fence, with time continuity, to make the action clear. This could be called in a vague general way a reverse angle cut, but is certainly not of the interesting kind that involves the interaction of two people facing each other. In any case, this particular instance is achieved by an ingenious cheat which depends on moving the actors to the other side of the symmetrical fence without moving the camera for the second shot.

In 1901 someone at the Edison Company applied the Méliès dissolve to join together the shots that form the single continuous scene of *Life Rescue at Long Branch*, although Méliès himself had only used the dissolve between separate scenes in different locations. The Biograph Company imitation of this film, *Caught in the Undertow* (1902), has the shots joined together with straight cuts, and the last moves straight in down the camera axis to Medium Long Shot of the resuscitation. Also in 1902, a British film, *The Interfering Lovers*, features a transition by a cut from Very Long Shot with a simultaneous change of camera direction of 60 degrees, so covering any minor discrepancies of actor position between the shots and ensuring a smooth transition (as seen in subsequent terms). However this principle was not consciously realised by the film-maker or his contemporaries, and for the next decade cuts to a closer shot continued to be made straight in down the camera axis.



'Mary Jane's Mishap' (G.A. Smith, 1903)

the frame containing the scene showing the person dreaming. The famous example here is Zecca's *Histoire d'un Crime* (1901). This film used the stage device of showing the sleeping man's memories by having part of the back-cloth vanish and reveal a smaller set behind, on which was enacted the past scene, or in this case, series of scenes. This device is repeated using photographic means in the first scene of Porter's *Life of an American Fireman*; the inset being another scene placed in a dark part of the frame by superimposition. There must surely be other examples in the next several years, but I have not found them so far. The related representation of spirits, angels, and so on by a simple superimposition had already appeared before 1900, and was continued through this period in films such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903), *The Old Chorister* (1905), and *Drink and Repentance* (1905).

An alternative approach particularly convenient for representing multi-scene dreams must surely have appeared before the instance of *And the Villain Still Pursued Her* (Vitagraph, 1906), which has already been mentioned as using dissolves into and out of the dream section.

Dialogue Titles

Towards the end of this period there are isolated instances of dialogue titles being cut in before a scene in place of the usual narrative title, but the films being produced at this time are still not long enough to contain a continuously developed, complex narrative in which the usefulness of such a feature would be obvious. The earliest example I have noticed occurs in Porter's *The Ex-Convict* of 1904, and there are others in *La Vie du Christ* (Jasset and Hatot, 1906), *Ali Baba et Les Quarantes Voleurs* (Pathé, 1905) and an English film of unknown title produced by the Urban company in 1906. (This last film is catalogued as *Father, Mother Wants You*, which is actually the first dialogue it contains, well into the body of the story.) In the case of the two French films, the dialogue titles they incorporate are the best known lines their respective stories contain.

Trick Effects

It is my view that excessive attention has been devoted to early trick films, and particularly those of Méliès, in view of the fact that they proved a dead-end as far as the development of the cinema is concerned. Nevertheless, such films still formed a fair part of production in the early years of the century, though the decline in their commercial importance was already evident by 1906. This is not to say that they have no other interesting qualities, just that enough is enough. The basic techniques that Méliès and everyone else used had already been established as standard before 1900, with one exception which will be noted below. There is no necessity to describe these techniques, which involve stopping the camera and adding or subtracting elements of the scene, superimpositions of various kinds made in the camera, including those made on a dark field within the background shot, and reverse motion, nor to comment on the films in which they appear. Their occurrence and manner of execution is always quite obvious, partly

because no cameras of the period had perfect registration and hence the two parts of a superimposition always move with respect to each other. There was no development in what Méliès did with them either, with the possible exception of his science-fiction fantasies.

The transference of Méliès' techniques to scenes shot in real surroundings (rather than on a stage set) by English film-makers also has its place in the history books already, but since it largely happened after 1900 some discussion is in order. The earliest examples were made by the Hepworth company in that very year, and consist of *Explosion of a Motor Car* and *The Bathers*. The effects in the first are achieved in the standard way by stopping the camera, substituting an imitation motor car for a real one, then starting the camera again and exploding the imitation car, and so on. Similar later films show a man being literally flattened by a steamroller and other events effected in the same way. *The Bathers* simply shows two bathers undressing and diving into the water, then the action apparently reverses in time and runs its course backwards. The reversed second half of the film was produced by printing each frame of the original negative in reverse order, and the laborious manipulation this involved to make each separate print ensured that after one or two similar productions the idea was abandoned.

The British motor car trick films can be related to the extra-filmic tradition of British nonsense, and lead me to mention *How It Feels To Be Run Over*, also made by Hepworth in 1900. In this film a car drives straight at the camera and when it is right up to it and out of focus there is a cut to a black frame decorated with stars and dashes and exclamation marks, and then a cut to the title 'Oh, Mother will be pleased.' The climax of this sort of thing was *The Big Swallow*, made by Williamson in 1901. In this, a shot of a photographer about to take a picture of a reluctant pedestrian is succeeded by a photographer's Point of View shot of the man approaching till his head fills the screen, at which point he opens his mouth to almost full screen size. There is a cut to a shot of the photographer and his camera falling around in a black void, and then a final Long Shot of the pedestrian walking away munching. An interesting technical point is that the focus is adjusted as the actor approaches the camera to keep the image sharp. Such adjustment of the focus during the course of a shot is extremely rare before World War I; the only early example occurs in *W. Gibson—Excentricité Américaine*.

The most important development in trick effects during the period first appears in a film made around 1900 by Arthur Melbourne-Cooper. This involves model animation done by shooting one single frame at a time, with minute adjustment of the model's position between exposures, so producing the effect of movement when the film is projected, and the subject is a match appeal for the Boer War. A stick figure made of matches is animated by this process, and it appears to write the text of the appeal on a blackboard. (The Méliès films that involve animated objects are done by pulling them about with invisible wires.) The technique of frame by frame animation requires a camera with gearing modified so that one turn of the crank handle exposes exactly one frame of film. It is possible that

this technique was more widely known at the turn of the century than is now apparent, for there exists a 1902 Biograph film of the demolition of the Star theatre made by time lapse photography using the same type of camera adaptation. In any case, frame by frame animation became standard procedure from 1904 onwards, with films such as *The Whole Dam Family and the Dam Dog* (Edwin S. Porter, 1904), *El Hotel Electrico* (Segundo de Chomon, 1905), *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (J. Stuart Blackton, 1906) and many others.

A new development in Méliès' work may be connected with single frame animation. It is difficult to be certain if his *Le Roi du Maquillage* (1904), which shows what would now be thought of as a 'Wolfman' type facial transformation, has been executed by single frame filming or by a series of closely spaced and even dissolves from one stage of the addition of more hair, etc. to the next.

Photography and Lighting

Most film production in this period continued to be done under direct sunlight, either on natural exteriors, on open-air stages with built sets representing interiors, or in the case of some major companies on glass-roofed stages. In 1904, however, this natural light began to be helped out on occasion with artificial lighting. This was provided either by simple arc floodlights on floor stands of the type already in use in the theatre or still photography, or by racks of mercury vapour tube lamps. The latter were usually referred to by the name of their principal manufacturer, Cooper-Hewitt, and the light they gave, similar to that from a very large modern 'soft-light', is very difficult to distinguish from diffuse natural light coming into a studio through the glass ceiling. In the early years light from Cooper-Hewitt lamps was used only to supplement natural light, but arc floodlights were used straight away to create special lighting effects, possibly modelled on existing theatrical usage, though no definite records exist of such theatrical practice before 1906. In any case, the scene of 'Old Age' in Edwin S. Porter's *The Seven Ages* has a fire effect done with an arc floodlight in a fireplace before which an old couple sit, illuminated solely by its light.

Partial uses of arc lighting also occur in *Rescued By Rover* (Hepworth, 1905), in which the scenes in the gypsy's attic room are illuminated by a pair of arc lights to simulate the light from the window, though as an addition to the general diffuse natural light; and in *The Firebug* (Biograph, 1905) arc floodlighting is used to heighten the effect of the fire-raising, though without any attempt at a flickering effect. (In this context, it is worth mentioning that Williamson's *Fire!* seems to have a flash of arc light put in from a corner of the room interior which is on fire, though it is just possible that it is photographic flash powder doing the job.) Another very early attempt at a lighting effect is the use of the sun reflected in a small mirror to produce a patch of bright light simulating a lantern beam in *Man Meets Ragged Boy*, a British film of 1902. An entirely different approach to the simulation of a beam of light occurs in a Pathé film of circa 1905, *Rescue from a Shipwreck*, in which a scene lit by the beam from a lighthouse is revealed within the

confines of a diagonal band delineated by a soft-edged mask in front of the lens, which is meant to represent the outline of the beam.

Returning to the eruption of effect lighting in 1905, there is another extremely interesting example in *Falsely Accused*, probably from the Hepworth studio. Here a man searching a totally dark room by lantern light is photographed doing just that, the sole illumination coming from a tiny arc concealed in his lantern! It seems to have been several years before this technique turned up again in films. There would seem to have been someone at Hepworth aware of the possibilities of available light photography, because in the same year *Stolen Guy* has a bonfire scene lit solely by the light from the bonfire.

Finally, and more importantly, what might be considered the beginning of figure lighting, as something separate from general scene lighting, can be seen in *La Vie du Christ*. In a few scenes, extra arc lighting was applied to the figures alone, on top of general diffused daylight falling equally on both set and figures, so sharpening the modelling of the latter in a new way that was to become standard not only at Gaumont but also at Vitagraph over the next few years.

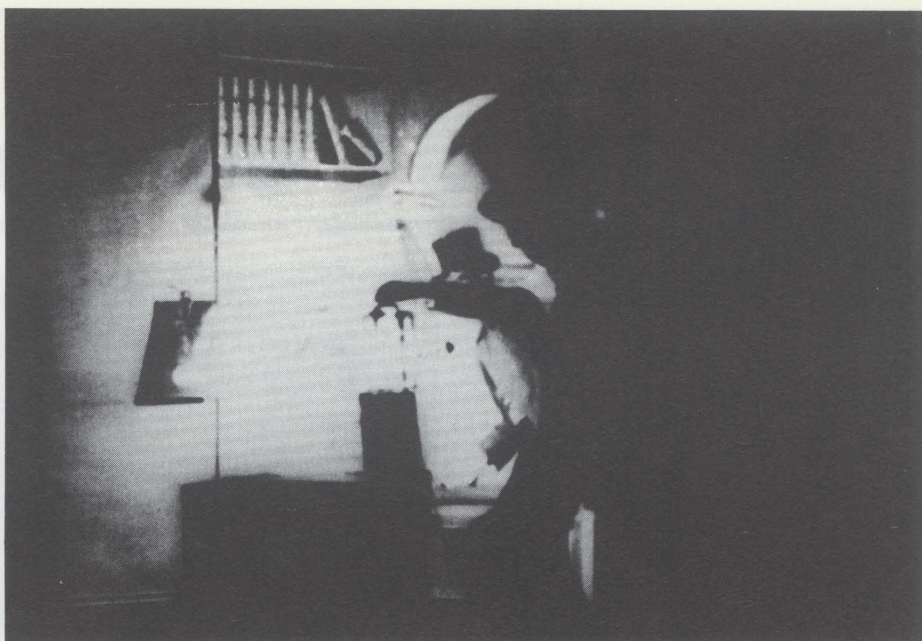
Acting

There are no general trends to be discerned in the acting in films of the 1900–06 period, though it should be pointed out that an appreciable number contain very naturalistic playing, from professional actors and non-professionals alike. To choose some examples at random, the acting in Williamson's *Soldiers Return* (1902), Porter's *The Kleptomaniac* (1905) and Biograph's *The Course of True Love* (1905) is very restrained. On the other hand, many films have extremely crude acting, one example being Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*. It is very difficult to see any patterns emerging, either taken by studio or by director.

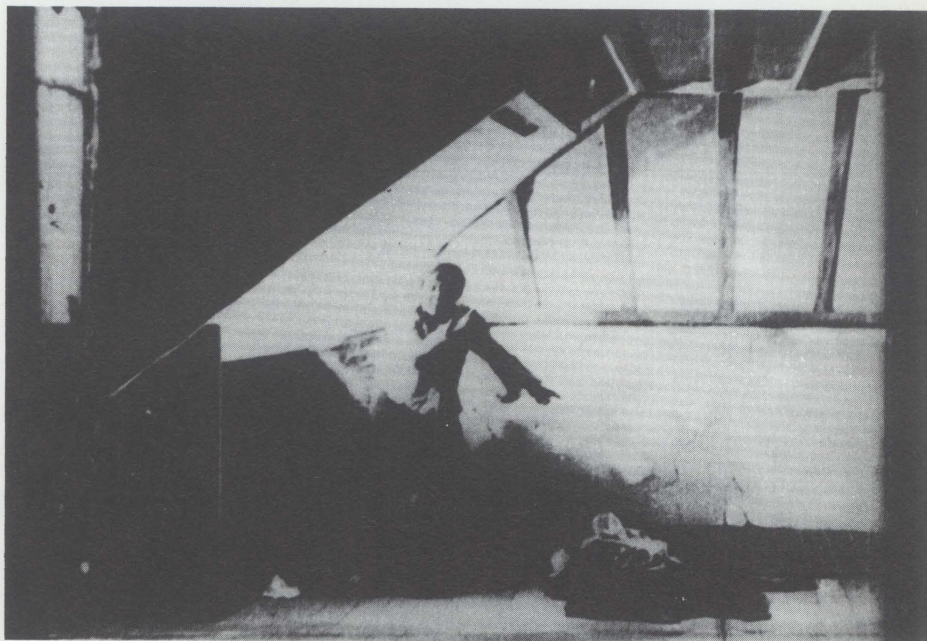
Conclusion

It should be emphasised that the films made before 1906 which still exist are only a fraction of the production of that period, and so if a particular feature is found in several of them, it probably also appeared in many more which are now lost. For instance, if about 30 surviving films have closer shots cut into the middle of a scene, as indeed they do, it is likely that there were more than 100 films actually made with this feature. On the other hand, if there is only a unique occurrence of a particular feature in surviving films, then it may very well have been unique at the time.

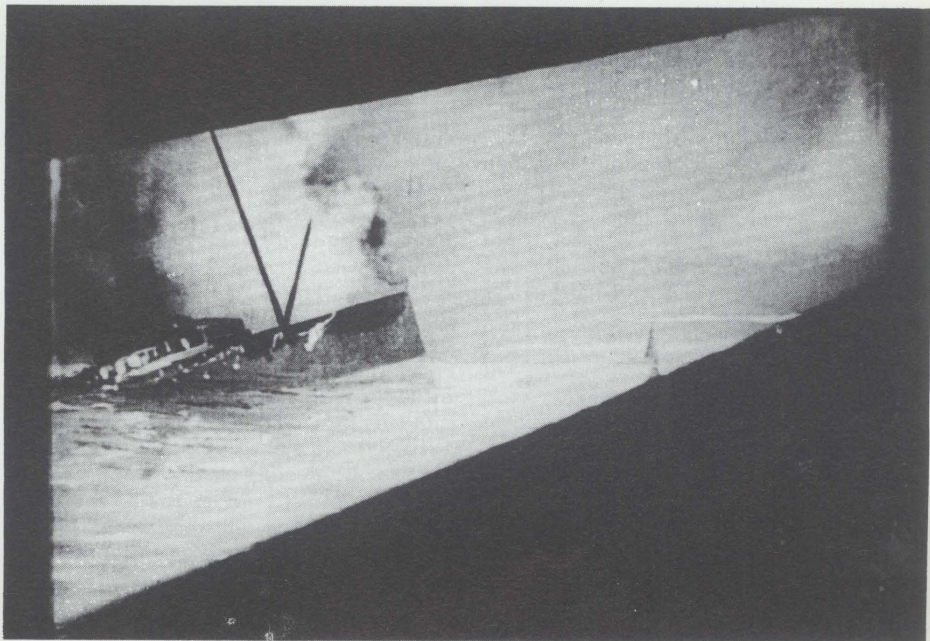
With this in mind, we can say that the major trends in the development of film form which emerge quite clearly through this period are the practice of cutting in to a closer shot of one kind or another within a scene, the elaboration of 'chase' construction and the use of Point of View shots. In 1904–06 we can also see the beginning of what was probably the continuous development of cross-cutting between parallel actions, and also the use of arc lighting for effect and figure lighting. Among the films that are still to be gathered in to the archives there may be some that will fill such obvious gaps as that in the development of dream sequences before 1906, or of chase films in 1902. I hope so. ■



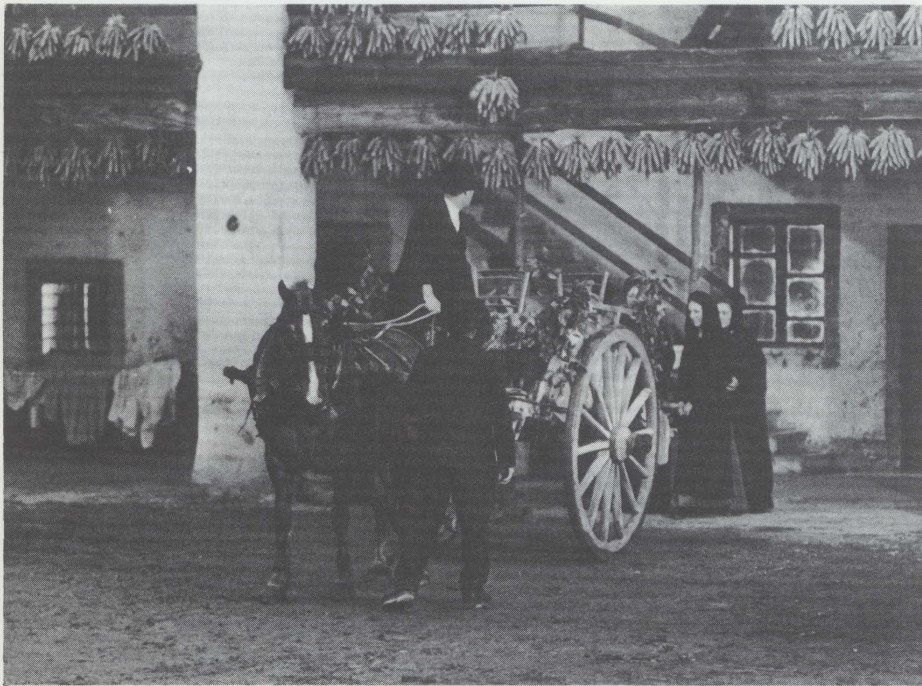
Above: lighting effect in *'Falsely Accused'* (1905); below: the gypsy's attic room in *'Rescued By Rover'* (1905), lit by arc lights



Below: simulation of a lighthouse beam in *'Rescue from a Shipwreck'* (ca. 1905)



FESTIVALS '78



Olmi's *'L'Albero degli Zoccoli'*, winner of the Cannes Grand Prix

CANNES

'Milton's *Paradise Lost*—one stage beyond *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*...' Pronouncements of such pristine absurdity, announcing future treats, can only be made at Cannes; where they are also guaranteed to pass almost unnoticed. After reading such heady stuff, one struggles to walk along the Croisette, blocked by a listless crowd and two television cameras, all gaping mournfully out at a seemingly empty beach. Are they waiting for a bomb to be detonated; for Muhammad Ali, in his new role as movie star, to leap from cover; or simply for some old-fashioned starlet to take her clothes off? More and more each year, the Cannes Festival seems to let the cinema out for two weeks on licence, as it were, locking whatever passes for outside reality into its dreams. Cannes is a grandiose fantasy working hard to sustain the illusion of an all-powerful entertainment industry: the crowds, which seem a little larger each year, are not so much the audience as the show—the press of people allows the cinema still to see itself, Norma Desmond fashion, as the unquestioned star.

Of late, attention had been slipping away from the centre towards the fringe events, but this year, under the Festival's new director, former SIGHT AND SOUND correspondent Gilles Jacob, the main competition firmly set out to reassert itself: films in the first week by Olmi, Malle, Chabrol, Oshima, Fassbinder, Resz and Skolimowski (*The Shout*, discussed elsewhere in this issue) looked, on paper, like a very strong hand indeed. Interestingly, none of these film-makers dealt with a theme that could be described as being both strictly

contemporary and realistic, which may or may not be taken as a sign of the times.

The art of distancing is part of the artifice of Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby*, a film which having drawn attention to itself by taking on the exceptionally touchy subject of child prostitution, and bringing rumours of banning in its wake, has the wit to realise that no further sensation is called for. The premise of Malle's film, and of Polly Platt's shrewd script, is that a self-willed little girl, growing up illiterate in a New Orleans brothel during the First World War, would inevitably fall with aplomb into the way of the world as it's presented to her. The establishment itself seems like a combination of well-ordered feudal estate and girls' school. There are trusty black retainers, a lazy Southern garden, a charming nursery; the girls are always good for a game of hide and seek; the proprietress (Frances Faye), ravaged, drugged, monstrous and indefatigable, commands a headmistress' respect. The necessary role of onlooker, the observer from the outside world, is played by Keith Carradine as the photographer E.J. Bellocq, whose camera converts sluts into odalisques. At the end, the child (Brooke Shields) is rescued for respectability, but the final freeze frame suggests that this is where equivocation sets in. Malle does not subvert orthodox morality by Shavian paradox, but rather by the look of the film (camerawork by Sven Nykvist) and of his self-possessed little heroine; he doesn't glamorise vice, but he does suggest that an establishment which knows its place in the world offers its own security, however dubious its purposes may be. The film is neither corrupt nor corrupting, though hardly a moral tale. More, in fact, a cool fairy-tale.

Oddly enough, there are some points of contact with Ermanno Olmi's *L'Albero degli Zoccoli* (*The Clog Tree*), which also ends with an expulsion from a world often brutish and irrational, but governed by its own reassuring certainties. The setting is a farm in Lombardy at the turn of the century, home for four or five families; the players are themselves peasants from the region; and the substance of the film, which Olmi has had in mind for many years, is village lore and family stories. The feeling of folk-tale comes through in the episode in which a lone widow prays (successfully) for an ailing cow; or the one in which a honeymoon couple go off on a marvellously filmed journey by river barge to visit the bride's aunt, a nun, and return with a ready-made baby, an orphan cannily wished on them from the convent. As always, Olmi works by the clear light of a Catholic conscience and an unsentimental regard for the ways plain people contrive to live together. In a sense, it is as though he had decided to counter the extravagance of 1900 with a more homely and also more just view of the rural community; and there are moments when he paints it with the massive respect and accuracy of an Italian Stubbs. At the end, one of the families is evicted, for a minor offence against the master's law. As their cart sets off into the lonely dark, with the specifically religious music of Bach heavy on the soundtrack, the sense is unmistakably of a departure from Eden—a place, at least, secured by principle.

Olmi's conservatism is not fashionable; though his film incidentally contains a long sequence of the killing of a pig which was nastier to watch than many of the more sensational sights on view. Chabrol, oddly enough making his first appearance in a Cannes competition after some twenty years of filming, is still concerned with killing people. The eponymous heroine of *Violette Nozière* was found guilty of patricide in 1934 (though the man she poisoned may not actually have been her father, and she let her mother off with half the dose). Eluard wrote a poem about her ('Violette rêvait de bains de lait'), the French left saw her as a victim of right-wing young men; and after escaping the guillotine, serving her sentence and being pardoned by de Gaulle, she lived on into the 1960s to become the respectable mother of five children. The case of this enigmatic bad lot, who at 18 was combining amateur prostitution and dreams of rather shoddy luxury with schoolgirl docility at home, and who eventually murdered for money, is undeniably fascinating. Chabrol opens it rivetingly, with a figure slipping through the darkness as a lighted bus sails out of the night, and develops it impressionistically, with a lot of swift cutting between the circumstances of Violette's multiple deceptions. The girl is most compellingly played by Isabelle Huppert, but one rather wishes that Chabrol had not felt it necessary to stretch his film to two hours, and to do so by

concentrating on the repetitive meshes of Violette's fantasies, the ultimately unanswerable why of her crime rather than the practical how. We never, curiously, see her in the key act of buying the poison.

Oshima's *The Empire of Passion* was generally felt to have fallen very flat, after its similarly titled predecessor. It's a well-made but surprisingly conventional ghost story, in which wife and lover murder the former's husband, an inoffensive rickshaw man, who seemingly rests peacefully for several years in the well where they have dumped the corpse before returning to haunt the guilty pair. The ghost is a rather humble apparition, still seeming conscious of his lowly station, and at one point offering his wife a lift in the rickshaw; the stormy lovers become increasingly distraught, in the Japanese wailing style. The press handout suggests that Oshima was concerned to suggest especially the power of natural forces and the changing seasons in bringing home the burden of guilt. But somehow this doesn't particularly emerge on the screen, so that one was left (as so often during this festival) with the sense of a film determined to convert an anecdote into a novel.

The over-stretched feeling certainly affected two more films in competition: Ricardo Franco's *Los Restos del Naufragio*, in which a young man retires to a home for the aged, expecting a retreat from life, but falls under the spell of a garrulous old dreamer, and Karoly Makk's *A Very Moral Night*, set in another well-conducted brothel and recounting what happens when the mother of a student who has become a permanent resident comes to call, and the establishment has to be briskly converted to instant respectability. Both these films have possibilities of idiosyncrasy and wit, the Makk in particular being filmed with plenty of slightly enervated Central European style, and both dissipate them by a seeming inability to let well alone. Even Paul Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman*, which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue, and which in its specifically New York Jewish idiom registers what are probably home truths, rambles off from the hard-edged survey of the separated woman's plight into a Hollywood denouement which allows her to have and eat several cakes at once. The American cinema, while obviously working hard to answer the old charge that it provides no good roles for women, still has some way to go before getting back even to where it was at the time of films like *Woman of the Year*.

Karel Reisz's *Who'll Stop the Rain* (ex *The Dog Soldiers*) offers only a heroine (the admirable Tuesday Weld) somewhat beside herself in graduating from pills to hard drugs. Reisz' film assimilates America, in the sense that it never tries to set up the kind of ambivalent, intriguing attitudes found, for instance, in Boorman's *Point Blank* or Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. It is a taxing thriller and chase story, 70s film noir shading off into outdoor action, in which two amateurs from Saigon try to smuggle a hefty parcel of heroin into the States and fall foul of a spectacularly corrupt narcotics agent and his gangster henchmen. The prologue is set in the madness of Vietnam, and the argument, that the whole Vietnam experience has virtually turned America insane, encourages the film to assume a tone of consistently overwrought savagery, as though

all the characters are so deep in the moral quagmire that almost any reasoned action has become purposeless. In a sense, all Reisz' features have been about obsessiveness of one kind or another; the problem here is rather similar to that which affected Arthur Penn's *Night Moves*—a lurking sense of ill-digested pretension. The most intriguing character, the war correspondent who sets the plot in motion, is also the least developed.

Fassbinder's *Despair*, his first English-language film, is another demonstration of screen internationalism. The opening is marvellously apposite, suggesting that in Fassbinder, his screenwriter Tom Stoppard and Dirk Bogarde, playing a Russian-born chocolate manufacturer in the Germany of the early 30s and seeming to have adopted a bitter chocolate-flavoured accent for the occasion, the cinema has at last found a team up to coping with Nabokov's silken tongue-twisters. Early scenes in the mauve-painted chocolate factory or the heavily mirrored sets, and between Bogarde and his chubby and sublimely dotty wife (Andrea Ferreol), who sees the Wall Street crash as a matter of actual holes in the road, promise great riches. But the plot, which requires the industrialist to encounter a man he regards as his double, and then to murder him with a view to escaping into his identity, gradually gets the better of them. Fassbinder can only hold it together on a more conventionally melodramatic level, foot stabbing hard on the accelerator as the vehicle lurches untidily forward.

The Directors' Fortnight offered Mrinal Sen's *The Outsiders*, an interesting study of a father and son, aggressively remote from the steady patterns of Indian village life, whose intransigence brings disaster when the son's wife, who has struggled to maintain domestic order in their unruly menage, is callously left to die in childbirth. Although the film is not Sen's best, being a little too schematic in its tone, it sustains a difficult division of sympathies, the dreadful comedy of daily life shifting into tragedy, with an

assurance that never falls back on manufactured incidents of plot. By contrast, Karen Arthur, director of the promising *Legacy*, tells another overwrought story in *The Mafu Cage*, about a deranged girl and the more sensible sister who is obviously heading for trouble in pampering her fantasies. Karen Arthur talks largely about 'a symbiotic, hermetic existence', but in spite of a lot of props, including the cage in which the crazy sister keeps her pet gorilla, the film is just a shocker with unrealised pretensions, and the kind of plot that can be seen coming a mile off.

The most accomplished of the first films I saw was Luc Béraud's *La Tortue sur le Dos*, about a writer who can't get going on a book, the disorder this brings about in his domestic life, and the outlandish escapades—which may be seen as part of the book he's writing—that he falls into after his wife leaves him. Béraud, a long-time assistant to Rivette, Marguerite Duras and Claude Miller, among others, has learned how to hold equivocal moods together with the glue of exact comic detail; and persuaded Bernadette Lafont into her best performance for some time as the woman who walks away, without the commotion of *An Unmarried Woman*, from the strains of life with a non-writing writer. Jean-François Stévenin is the dourly self-obsessed and often comical hero, a walking cloud of delusions and deceptions.

Béraud's film has a sense of size and scale, which were distinctly welcome in a week too often given over to the overblown gesture. A film, for instance, like Miguel Littin's *El Recurso del Metodo*, a French-Mexican-Cuban co-production, full of expensive upholstery and massed crowds of uniformed extras, which progresses at great length and in a tone of sledge-hammer irony through the life and times of a Latin American dictator. And, sadly, one should record the sorry outcome of Joseph Losey's second French film, *Les Routes du Sud*, which is heavy with echoes of *La Guerre est Finie*—Jorge Semprun as scriptwriter, Yves Montand as

'Violette Nozière': Stéphane Audran, Jean Carmet, Isabelle Huppert



star, a story about exiles from Spain and their trips across the border—but done in a style which too often brings Losey to the dangerous verge of self-parody. The scene in which Montand mourns his dead wife, driving a Land Rover down to the sea and staring out at the sunset while the waves lap over the wheels and the car radio wails, makes one wince for a film-maker so far away from the detailed precisions of *Accident*.

Finally, a documentary about a sedulous ape, *Koko, the Talking Gorilla*, directed by Barbet Schroeder and photographed by Nestor Almendros. Koko, a young female gorilla living in California, has been taught deaf and dumb sign language and displays considerable prowess, though as with other similar demonstrations one is never quite sure how far the undoubtedly sagacious ape is displaying reasoning power and how far merely revealing any well-trained animal's awareness of, as it were, the side on which its banana is buttered. An interesting point in the relationship between Koko and her instructor, a strong-willed Californian blonde, is that the acquisition of language (as in *L'Enfant Sauvage*) seems inextricably bound up with morality: right and wrong and correct American nursery manners enter the world of the ape-child. Some wonderfully forlorn shots of Koko on a hillside suggest the film-makers' awareness of the equivocal nature of the experiment. At the same time, the film argues for the rights of animals, of which the first, just possibly, might be the right to take off its sweater and chain and head back to the zoo.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

The first Cannes Festival under the direction of Gilles Jacob was generally more rewarding than those of the past few years. Unfortunately, he seems to have put his best foot forward, in the sense that he programmed his strongest films early on, leaving little of outstanding quality for the second week. Apart from the films by Olmi, Chabrol, Fassbinder and Béraud (discussed above), the film that impressed me most was Peter

Handke's *The Left-Handed Woman*. This is definitely a minority report: I know of very few people who share my admiration. (Are we the 'happy few' or the 'foolish few'? Time will tell.)

Starring Edith Clever and Bruno Ganz (the couple from *The Marquise von O...*), the film is about the experience of a wife who suddenly (existentially) decides that she wants to live apart from her husband, alone with her young son. The film was shot in a southern suburb of Paris (either because the husband, an import-export man, wanted to live near Orly airport, or because Handke himself now lives in Clamart), so that the German Marianne is already a somewhat alienated figure. Her child goes to a German-language school, and she doesn't seem to mix much with her French neighbours. When her husband comes home after a business trip, she announces to him, quite calmly, that she now wants to live alone—at least for a time. (According to Handke, she may indeed return to him in a year or five years.) The whole film takes place during the couple of months in which she begins her apprenticeship not so much in loneliness as in solitude. And indeed she does have a difficult time of it. She has visitors, of course; her father comes to see her, as does her former boss; she is friendly with the teacher at the German school who takes in her husband after he is thrown out, and she becomes acquainted with a feminist group. But most of her time is spent either with her little boy or alone, thinking, perhaps for the first time in her life.

Many people were irritated by the silences in the film: Marianne does not talk much, nor is there anyone she particularly wants to talk to. But again, as Handke reminded us at his press conference, these are the first few difficult months. Visually, Handke says, he was influenced by the paintings of the American Andrew Wyeth—although to me Handke and his cameraman Bobby Muller, also responsible for all Wenders' films, seem much less sentimental than Wyeth. Although there is a basic difference between this film and Paul Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman*, in that here it is the woman who takes the

decision to break up the marriage, the two films have enough in common for one suddenly to realise that, however entertaining *An Unmarried Woman* may be, the Handke film is not only more profound but appreciably more honest. Handke is already well-known as a novelist, playwright and screenwriter, and it seems to me that he has now shown himself a film-maker to be reckoned with.

A film of which more was expected, Ariane Mnouchkine's *Molière*, turned out to be very disappointing. She is a great stage director (as witness her production of *1789*, which played both in Paris and at the Round House in London), but her film of that production in no way managed to evoke the excitement and originality of the work on the stage. *Molière*, however, was conceived directly for the screen, so that hopes were higher. Unhappily, the two hours which I saw (the film runs for four hours) were a kind of semi-Brechtian biopic in the worst pre-war MGM tradition. The sequence that finally moved me to depart was a particularly dreadful one in which someone rushes in, full of excitement, to tell the young Molière some great news. 'Guess who's in Paris now!' 'Who?' 'Descartes.' Or words to that effect.

Krzysztof Zanussi's *Spiral* I also found unsatisfactory. Like his *Illumination* it is about death and, again like that film, it is set in the mountains. Zanussi's point seems to be that he is much opposed to the current theory that terminal patients should be given tranquillisers and other drugs, so that they will hardly notice they are dying. He feels that death is something the patient should expect, something he should experience. The trouble, however, is that one couldn't work out from the film itself why the hero was about to die. True, he had been in a mountain accident, but neither frostbite (my first guess) nor even gangrene (my second) need necessarily be lethal. Zanussi cleared up the point at his press conference by explaining that his hero was actually dying of leukemia: he had shot a scene in which this was made clear, but the medical consultants persuaded him to cut it, on the grounds that some leukemia sufferers might be discouraged by the film and imitate the hero's final suicide. On humanitarian grounds, they were probably right, although without this essential piece of information the film becomes none too easy to follow.

Giovanna Gagliardo has previously been known as a scriptwriter, notably on Jancsó's Italian films. She has now made her first feature, *Maternale*, and it was one of the most striking in the Directors' Fortnight. The theme is very simple: the over-protective, 'phallic' mother who, although she doesn't realise it, is all too happy that her daughter is slightly crippled. The treatment is more complex, however, for in a single day the director sums up several years, and the girl's 'cure' and her separation from her mother is compressed into one day's action. Carla Gravina, as the mother, seems a little stiff, but this apart, I found the film affecting and very promising. No doubt Giovanna Gagliardo's next film will turn up in competition, so speedy is the rate of recuperation these days by the main festival. So many of the Directors' Fortnight 'stars' have been taken away from them—Oshima, Fassbinder, etc.—that they are a little hard-pressed to come up with equally impressive equivalents. But with Gagliardo they have

'Koko, the Talking Gorilla': Koko and her teacher, Penny Patterson



certainly discovered a new talent.

The festival went out somewhat flatly, and the big disappointment was certainly Billy Wilder's *Fedora*. Of course, being by Billy Wilder it is head and shoulders above a lot of other films; but being by Billy Wilder it is also a let-down. The theme is somewhat similar to that of *Sunset Boulevard*, and once again the film stars William Holden in a key role and as the narrator. But it fails where *Sunset Boulevard* signally succeeded, in that it is impossible to believe that either Hildegard Knef or Marthe Keller could ever have been a great star. They are good actresses, but a star is something else. Gloria Swanson, as she never tired of telling us, had a face. Sadly, Marthe Keller and Hildegard Knef don't have faces.

Another problem with the film is its big plot twist. I don't intend to reveal this, but only to point out that it comes far too late in the film to do any good. Hitchcock was right: it is much better to let your audience in on the secret early in the game, so that they can enjoy the contrast between what they know and what one or more of the characters doesn't know. Here we learn the secret at the same time as William Holden, two-thirds through the film, and although we may salute the scriptwriter's ingenuity, it is very difficult at that stage to make the necessary readjustment in our view of the main characters. Of course, there are many funny moments. When Marthe Keller questions the young William Holden (played by another actor) about what he usually does on a date, and he replies that the evening usually starts with a couple of cheeseburgers, she splendidly and imperiously demands, 'And what, may I ask, is a cheeseburger?' But it is evident that the part of the star was written for a Dietrich or a Garbo; and since, unfortunately, neither of them saw fit to accept the role, the film cannot get over the problem of how we are to believe in what we are told about *Fedora*.

RICHARD ROUD

The most distinctive national contribution at Cannes was that of Australia, who fielded no less than 16 features in the various sections. The Australians having at last got a film in the competition, it was bad luck that Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* turned out to be one of the weaker items, its horrific subject matter (the murder of a white family by an enraged aborigine) being blunted by obvious scripting and some awkward direction of the actors. A better choice, though it was not ready in time for viewing by the selection committee, might have been Phillip Noyce's *Newsfront*, a really distinctive and original study of two rival newsreel companies in the 40s and 50s, featuring some sensational matching of actuality material with reconstruction. Along the way, Noyce gently fills in a good deal of Australian social history, moulds his actors into a smooth ensemble, and stages a virtuoso flood sequence which begins with an almost Keaton-like jokiness and shifts imperceptibly into tragedy.

Bruce Beresford seems finally to have put Barry McKenzie behind him. His *The Getting of Wisdom* is a sensitive account of a young country girl's coming of age in a fashionable women's college at the turn of the century, wonderfully luminous in terms of lighting and decor. Other films show the Australian



Bruce Beresford's 'The Getting of Wisdom'

cinema's current preoccupation with recreating the immediate past, on a note of balanced nostalgia rather reminiscent of the American cinema of the 30s and 40s. Both Crombie's *The Irishman* and Dobson's *The Mango Tree* employ luscious exterior photography and mellow, golden colours which often recall Ford and Hawks, though without overtones of self-conscious imitation. Both also suffer from that sketchy and diffuse script construction which has become the Australian cinema's most evident weakness. Nevertheless, the clear promise of earlier festivals has now begun to look like real achievement, not only in the handsome period pieces but in some of the modern subjects (*Mouth to Mouth*, *In Search of Anna*) dealing with the gritty underside of Australian society.

JOHN GILLET

BERLIN

Next year, the image of Berlin as the delegation capital of Europe will be enhanced by the opening of an immense, self-contained congress centre. Meanwhile, the organisers of the 28th Berlin Film Festival—having brought forward their opening date to February—redoubled efforts to screen an even broader selection of works than in the past: a season of films directed by one of last year's jurors, Larissa Shepitko; Cuban, Spanish and Australian programmes; the second half of a two-part Marlene Dietrich retrospective; a selection of the films censored by the Nazis; a preview of new German films (from a student work supervised by Douglas Sirk to an English-language masterwork by the exiled Bergman); and, on top of this, the market section, the competition films and the pot-pourri of the Young Forum. Judging from this year, however, it seems that producers are withholding the prestige productions of 1978—as opposed to 1977—for showcase screenings elsewhere. Bustling and gleaming though the festival's new offices were, in the long run they are unlikely to prove a more

congenial background for the television lights than the palms of the Riviera.

From an arbitrary selection of some fifty films, two stood out: one for its boiled-down intensity, and the other for its equally intense confusion. Both dealt with the faces of political oppression. Set in the unreal, infernal Berlin of 1923, Bergman's *The Serpent's Egg* follows Abel Rosenberg, a Jewish trapeze artist (David Carradine), a physically agile but spiritually weak man, who is suspected by a plodding detective (Gert Fröbe) of complicity in a series of murders, in fact committed by a scientist in the course of some abominable human experiments. Shot by Sven Nykvist in a bravura Grand Guignol style, with one or two astonishing set-piece exteriors, the film conveys as clearly and as pessimistically as *The Silence* that chill moment when the tank appears in the street beneath your window. Despite the familiarity of Bergman's theme, the extent of man's capacity for inaction in the face of injustice (and he hammers in this message with relentless goriness), one of the film's strengths derives from the way it details the mechanics of suspicion: the way in which Abel, who does not look Jewish and is in no sense political, nevertheless feels himself a 'guilty Jew' and inevitably begins to lose his identity and to disbelieve his innocence.

Bergman, as is his habit, cross-references the film: Rosenberg was the name of the trapped artist in *Shame*, and the scientist is that old familiar, Dr. Vergerus. In addition, other nightmarish filmic memories recur: there is talk of the case being investigated by Lang's Dr. Lohmann. Ironically, however, when one considers Bergman's recent work, the film also communicates a sense of human beings drained of their humanity. Liv Ullmann, for example, perhaps the most vulnerably human of all the director's heroines, here plays Abel's sister-in-law, a painted cabaret whore, compromised and dead behind the eyes. The only character who shows any genuine signs of life, the only one who actually believes wholeheartedly in what



Niklaus Schilling's 'Rheingold': Elke Haltaufderheide, Rüdiger Kirschstein

he is doing, is the plausible and machinating Vergerus (Heinz Bennent), a malevolent Bergman magician who—with a twisting irony—shoots films of his victims through two-way mirrors. At the end of the film, as the Munich *putsch* fails and is dismissed, Vergerus sees his empire collapse. He commits suicide holding up a mirror to watch his own convulsions and accurately predicts that his work, although now reviled, will soon come into its own.

Deutschland im Herbst, directed by twelve West German film-makers, among them Brustellin, Sinkel, Fassbinder, Kluge, Reitz and Schlöndorff, is set very much in the Federal Republic of today. Kluge explained: 'We were impressed by the events of last autumn, the kidnapping of Kappler in Rome, then Schleyer, then Mogadishu, then the deaths of the human beings in Stammheim.' Financed by such disparate sources as Filmverlag der Autoren and *Der Spiegel*, the film illustrates the dilemma of an equally disparate group of film-makers who, feeling they must make an individual/collective statement, were then compromised by the exigencies of a short production schedule and by the fact that, having no discernible framework on which to hang their thoughts, their conclusions emerged as bewilderingly inconclusive.

The film's contents range from newsreel clips of Rommel's cortège, through scenes of the massed dignitaries at Schleyer's funeral and a fictitious argument among TV executives about a controversial production of *Antigone* (scripted by Heinrich Böll), to a long elegiac sequence recording the burial of the Stammheim prisoners. The most abruptly startling and subjective episode has Fassbinder at one point interviewing his mother, who concludes with an endorsement of benevolent dictatorship, and at the next physically abusing his boyfriend in a display

of domestic tyranny—the corollary, one presumes, of public injustice and private impotence. The film-makers, however, never really come to grips with the implications of the fact that, for example, an apparently repressive state can also allow the filming of a long interview with an imprisoned radical lawyer. Judgments are eschewed: the dead—the murderers and their victims—simply become aspects of German history. Kluge again: 'You can compare this [the irony that Rommel, having been murdered by the state, was then accorded a state funeral] with what happened at Stuttgart, where the Mayor had to decide how to bury the Stammheim people. He decided in a very human manner that they had to be buried in the same cemetery as Theodor Heuss and the industrialist Bosch: he decided that they belong to our history, in the same way that Mogadishu belongs to our history. The contradictions belong to one nation: only if all the country's contradictions are together, can you accept this history and understand it.'

Two films which few seemed anxious to defend were Lina Wertmüller's *A Night Full of Rain*, made in English but shown here in a dubbed version, and Niklaus Schilling's *Rheingold*, which dealt with the murder of a woman by her jealous husband in such a resolutely non-naturalistic way that it drew some baleful comments from jury chairman Patricia Highsmith (see 'In the Picture'). That Wertmüller, the one-time assistant of Fellini, has chosen to present her political beliefs with an exuberant but nevertheless calculated playfulness seems to some to indicate a tasteless lack of seriousness. *The End of the World in Our Usual Bed in a Night Full of Rain*, to give it its complete baroque title, remains, however, a work which for all its noisy stridency has a good deal to say about the chemistry of attraction and about why an unsuitably matched couple—Paolo, a middle-

class Italian communist (Giancarlo Giannini), and Lizzy, an American professional photographer (Candice Bergen)—still cannot disentangle the memories of their past from their experience of the seemingly insupportable present. Told in flashbacks during the night of the title and complete with a Fellini-esque chorus which materialises from time to time in Lizzy and Paolo's memento-strewn apartment, the film contains two scenes which are surely the litmus for whether one finds Wertmüller's style ludicrous or compelling: the first frenzied seduction in a splendidly ornate Italian monastery and the final, long, cathartic fight in the pouring rain.

Niklaus Schilling's second feature *Die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies*, a stylish and unsettling story about an incestuous relationship between a woman and her brother, a bit-part movie actor, was shown at Berlin last year; his new film—heartily booed by the audience—confirms that Schilling is a director who, like Wertmüller, is not afraid to carry an individual method through to the bitter end. He relentlessly heaps on the sexual imagery—a train, tunnels, a knife, the ever-present Rhine—in this clattering, doom-laden journey in the trans-Europe express, the Rheingold. The film, which is placed head on into its context by one of the passengers who recounts at some length the legend of the Lorelei, is chiefly distinguished by its shimmering dream-like tone, one facet of which is the warping of time during a sequence in which the husband pursues the train by car.

Full of another sort of quirky individuality was *Hot Tomorrows*, the second low-budget feature by a young American, Martin Brest. This witty, incongruous tribute to the Hollywood musical, dead entertainers in general and Laurel and Hardy in particular, centres on two New York boys—one a serious aspiring writer, the other a likeable brilliantine punk—who are discovered in California, broke on Christmas Eve. Filmed in black-and-white and forever shooting off on surreal tangents—at one point the boys find themselves in a run-down bar, *The Paradise*, being abused by a dwarf while a splendid mock-Dietrich entertains the near-empty establishment—the film is infused with a sustained but periodically punctured melancholy regretfulness. When one of the boys is killed in a car accident, the film concludes with a charming lyrical conceit as the two friends are reunited in paradise, there to dance the title number from *42nd Street*. One of the film's several incidental pleasures is the voice of Orson Welles in a cod radio advertisement for a funeral home that wishes to attract drunken drivers for a sobering cup of coffee. Welles appeared in person in his own new documentary, *Filming 'Othello' by Orson Welles*. Seated in a darkened but subtly lit room beside an editing table, the director recalls in his best oratorical-anecdotal manner the vicissitudes of the production of his 1951 Shakespearean adaptation: stranded in North Africa and separated from their costumes, the crew shot the murder of Roderigo in a Turkish bathhouse, the cast wrapped round with sheets. The reliability of this documentary as a primary source for the film historian is open to doubt, but as a statement on Welles himself it will surely prove invaluable.

JOHN PYM

In The Picture

Hungary: Realism and Renewal

For three or four years now, the Hungarian cinema has been in dire need of some reviving impetus. A young and vocal section, concentrated in and around the Balázs Béla Studio, had always insisted that fresh inspiration could come from making films with social relevance, and that aesthetic considerations must necessarily be a by-product. They were and are determined to make documentaries and *cinéma vérité* semi-fictions to involve the people they depict, provoking their direct response.

The Balázs Béla Studio was founded in 1961 to enable recent film school graduates to gain practical experience on eight or nine films a year. There are no parallels anywhere to the freedoms and opportunities enjoyed by the active members of the BBS. It is led by an elected team of five, who choose the projects and scripts to be filmed; the Ministry has the right only of veto, not of suggestion. By 1977 Hungary's film industry had been reorganised into ten autonomous studios, with the BBS continuing to fulfil its experimental role; but from having been the yeast in Hungarian film life, the ideals and influence of the BBS have come to dominate it. The annual muster of 22 new films which was held at Pécs earlier this year included both quasi-documentaries and documentaries such as *Battlefield*, by Janos Rózsa.

Rózsa's career has been divided between feature films (*Grimaces*, *Dreaming Youth*, *Spiderball*) and investigative documentaries. For *Battlefield* he used film stock originally set aside for testing locations, and he ended up tracing the planning and building of a vast memorial park at Mohács to mark the 450th anniversary of Hungary's defeat by the Turks, which began a 150-year-long occupation. The controversy aroused was not merely about the aesthetic merit of the design, or the political implications of commemorating a defeat, but the way the memorial, placed over unexcavated mass graves, destroyed important archaeological sites. It is a comment on Hungarian television that such a subject, excellently handled as it is, should be made by a feature studio on 35mm stock for cinema release.

Meanwhile, a director from the

Dokumentfilm Studio, Pál Schiffer, developed the idea of *Gyuri*, a quasi-documentary feature shot in 16mm and blown up to 35mm, from his earlier reportage films. Schiffer had always been interested in gypsy communities and became involved in sociological research into the rural settlements where most of Hungary's gypsies live. A traditional nomadic life is impossible for them: government policy is aimed at total integration. In his documentaries *Village Outskirts* and *What About the Gypsy Children?*, Schiffer looked at the barriers between reality and this Utopian ideal. Both films relied on interview techniques, and Schiffer was beginning to be irked by their limitations. When a family or group started to lose their tempers and argue with each other instead of with the interviewer, he began to plan how such natural confrontations could be shaped into a full-length film.

Gyuri Cséplő, the eponymous hero, is a young man of exceptional intelligence and charm. Even before he met the film-makers, he had tried to start a school and improve conditions on a co-operative farm for the casual workers. He was

thinking of trying his luck in Budapest, and Schiffer suggested that they would set up a crew to film his arrival, his search for work and lodgings and later experiences in the city. The personnel officers, hostel wardens and workmates he met knew only that a documentary was being filmed; Gyuri was just one of many applicants. It is possible that the presence of a film crew ensured friendlier treatment, though there is evidence that the urban Hungarian, unlike the peasant, does not dislike gypsies; at worst, his kindness is patronising. Moreover, the life-style of the poorest industrial workers was not far removed from that of the gypsy settlements; thus the film's subject is not racism, but the condition of the underprivileged in an allegedly classless society.

A larger and more subtly underprivileged group, women, forms the subject of *Three Sisters*, by Istvan Dárday and Györgyi Szalai. Dárday was one of the five who head the BBS, and *Three Sisters* is a co-production between the BBS and his other, feature-film studio. His previous and much praised film, *Holiday in Britain*, had already explored the techniques of using a non-professional cast whose real-life situations resembled their parts in the film. *Three Sisters* (also called *Filmnovel*) originally ran for eight hours, but at Pécs, and in the Forum of Young Film in Berlin, we had the final 4½-hour version. It is still too long, although the contrasting personalities of the girls vary the pace and mood. They first appear in close-up, talking of their dreams and ambitions, and the next few years show not how they grow, but how they become cramped, stunted, defeated by the limitations on their lives.

Ferenc Kósa's feature-length *Portrait of a Champion* is not quite a documentary, revealing as much of the attitude and artistic philosophy

of its creator as it does of its subject, the Olympic pentathlon champion András Balczó. Since he stopped competing, Balczó has been neglected by the Pentathlon Association, and not involved in teaching or training others. The film provides a platform for Balczó's grievances which his own charisma and Kósa's integrity as a creative artist (he directed *Ten Thousand Suns*, *Beyond Time*, *Snowfall*) invite us to accept as a critique of Hungarian circumstances. The film does not examine whether the complaints are wholly justified; instead we are practically hypnotised by Balczó, his beauty, faith, strength and weaknesses. He is poised like a sculpture in a gallery, perfect from all sides, admired from all sides, and we are left to ask whether isolation is the natural consequence of being exceptional, or the fault of a society which praises the exceptional while nurturing the mediocre.

Portrait of a Champion, *Gyuri* and *Three Sisters* share an immediacy which makes most of the conventional studio-shot features seem stilted and static. One of the exceptions is *My Father's Happy Years*, Sándor Simó's third film. Simó writes literary scripts, and he had trouble in his earlier films in finding the right pictorial language. But with *My Father's Happy Years*, a slightly stylised, distanced approach flowed almost naturally once he had thought of the funeral scene at the beginning. Simó's hero sets up a small pharmaceutical factory in 1945, only to find it confiscated and himself interned after the Stalinist coup of 1949. From the opening scene, in which a child's sledge serves as a hearse, through the reassuring friendliness of the Russian soldiers, to the final freeze over the bleak fields around the internment camp, the film conjures up the authentic flavour of those forgotten years.

Of the films set in the present,

The gypsy in town: Gyuri Cséplő in Pál Schiffer's 'Gyuri'



three slightly satirical comedies betray the belated influence of the Czech cinema of the 60s. Ferenc Andras' *The Devil Beats his Wife* won the Hungarian Critics' Prize and much popular success; Zsombolyai's *Do Not Lean Out* challenges but cannot survive comparison with *Closely Observed Trains*. I had more enjoyment from Gyula Gazdag's *The Swap*, in which a small provincial museum is chosen by a TV crew as the setting of an 18th century opera, and a satire on the cross-purposes of professional and rural cultural life develops when the local dignitaries want the stars to join in a fundraising concert for the village hall.

Perhaps expectations had been whipped too high, but both Istvan Gaál's *Legato* and Sándor Sára's *Eighty Hussars* were disappointingly scripted; their visual beauty failed to compensate for weaknesses of dramatic structure, and for elocuting players. The need to borrow stage actors who cannot adapt to the camera, and even less to the dubbing mike, is the current blight on Hungarian films, and the success of the quasi-documentaries may be largely due to their amateur casts.

None the less, there is an inextinguishable vitality in this industry, and a great willingness to hail all films that are still in production, or not quite finished, as masterpieces. A new film by András Kovács is said to be his best since *Cold Days*; Pál Sándor's *Deep Water* is eagerly awaited; coming away from a sneak preview of Márta Mészáros' new film, Miklós Jancsó said, 'She's a genius of a director.' Jancsó himself was busy assembling the cast for *Hungarian Rhapsody*, a six-hour trilogy based on the career of a Hungarian politician who veered from the extreme right to the left between the 1910s and 40s. The differences from his historical model seem bound to outweigh the similarities; unlike the documentary-loving BBS directors, Jancsó still trusts to his imaginative powers in jettisoning accuracy for the sake of truth.

MARI KUTTNA

Buñuel and Louÿs

Reviewers have tended to stress that *Cet Obscur Objet du Désir* is 'loosely' or 'remotely' based on Pierre Louÿs' novel *La Femme et le Pantin*, previously filmed by Sternberg and (after an earlier producer had turned down Buñuel's treatment) by Duvivier. (The reviewers have, however, also tended to remark on the difficulty of actually finding a copy of the novel.) If you trouble to make the comparison, the points of coincidence are at least as striking as the differences; though there is, it must be said, an insuperable difficulty in reading Louÿs after watching Buñuel. It becomes impossible to tell any more how much of the mocking irony which colours subsequent reading was intended by Louÿs or has simply spread over from the film.

The story of the *amour fou* of Mateo/Mathieu (Buñuel changes Louÿs' Spanish hero into a Frenchman, and then perversely casts a Spaniard in the role) for the mysteriously capricious Conchita Perez,

is essentially the same, if different in management. In Louÿs, Don Mateo relates his story to a young French friend, André Stévenol, who has himself been bewitched and, already, teased by Concha. Mateo relates how he first glimpsed Concha three and a half years before on a train—she was then 16. Already fascinated, he next saw her working—naked to the waist like the rest of the girls—in a cigar factory. *She took him home to meet her mother, who colluded in subsequent private meetings, evidently grateful for Mateo's gifts of money. Thus encouraged, Mateo proposed to the mother that, for a certain sum, Concha should become his mistress. The two women thereupon disappeared from Seville.*

Concha re-entered his life some months later, and began to tease him with promises, which she always managed to frustrate—first extricating herself by simple ruses, then presenting herself in his bed clad in an impenetrable chastity garment. Again she vanished, to reappear months later in a cabaret in Cadiz. Discovering her dancing naked in a private room, Mateo made a terrible scene. In the reconciliation that followed he promised to marry her. Having been made mistress of her own house, however, Concha promptly shut Mateo out of it, forcing him to witness her making love with a young man. The morning after this humiliating event, Concha again coolly presented herself at Mateo's home. Exasperated beyond bearing, he thrashed her violently. Delighted, she told him: 'Oh! Mateo! comme tu m'aimes.' For the first time he saw her sincere.

Concha's masochistic need for Mateo's beatings now however drove her to fabricate fictitious or actual incidents of infidelity to provoke him to further punishments. Then she herself revealed insane possessive jealousy, sacking the female servants and physically attacking any woman

who chanced to come near the house. The tormented Mateo fled to Tangier. When he returned, Concha had married a man who had since gone to Bolivia . . .

Despite this awesome story, André Stévenol sees Concha, sleeps with her, and agrees to go off to Paris with her. As they are about to leave, a letter arrives from Mateo: 'Ma Conchita, je te pardonne. Je ne puis vivre où tu n'es pas. Reviens. C'est moi, maintenant, qui t'en supplie à genoux. Je baise tes pieds nus. Mateo.'

It will be seen that the whole of that part of Louÿs' plot here indicated in italic forms the central section of Buñuel's scenario. Much of the dialogue is taken directly from Louÿs, and some of the most characteristically Buñuel notions, like the grotesque chastity garment or the scene where Mateo is locked outside the gate of the house he has given to Concha, exactly realise Louÿs' own descriptions.

The major divergences from the original are established in the first couple of reels: the updating to a present, or near future, in which terrorist bombs and other atrocities are as familiar as Saturday sporting fixtures; the train journey which provides Mateo with a whole group of confidants; the bucket of water he throws over the pursuing Concha on the sage principle that 'il vaut mieux arroser quelqu'un que de l'assassiner'; the flashback introduction of Concha as a housemaid found through the small ads; the whimsical personification of Concha through two actresses.

It is even a trifle surprising to find Buñuel eschewing Louÿs' final scenes, whose comic irony could not but commend themselves to him. They are omitted, presumably, only because his own brilliant finale is more directly to the point of what is the 'obscur objet du désir'. The title

seems obliquely to be suggested by a phrase in the book, when Stévenol dismisses blonde women as 'ces pâles objets du désir'. The central theme is clearly posited by the outburst of Louÿs' Concha to the insatiable (or, at least, unsatisfied) Mateo: '... ce n'est pas moi que tu aimes, mais seulement ce que je te refuse? Tous les femmes peuvent tu le donner, pourquoi me le demandes-tu, à moi qui résiste? Est-ce parce que tu me sais vierge?' For Buñuel the symbol (and in *El* the practical concomitant) of virginity is a needle and thread. Here the symbol is used in the poster for the film (beautiful lips roughly sewn together) and, conclusively, in the last scene of the film, where in close-up, a woman's hands worry at the hopeless task of repairing a rent bridal gown.

DAVID ROBINSON

Highsmith as Juror

By reputation a misanthropist and a recluse, Patricia Highsmith is just about the last person you'd expect to find at an overcrowded urban film festival. But the surprise of finding her presiding very conscientiously over the jury at Berlin wasn't as strong as the desire to meet, not just a favourite mystery writer, but also the primal source for *The American Friend* (Wenders), *Dites-lui que je l'aime* (Miller) and the nearly finished film by Geissendörfer, adapted from her novel *The Glass Cell*.

Pat Highsmith, as she prefers to be called, arrived rather late for our meeting. Unaccustomed to movie-watching ('I did tell the Festival from the start that I'm not the right person to look at films—I don't even have a television at my house'), and prevented from sleeping in the cinema by the ever-zealous Secretary to the Festival Jury, she had taken to catnapping in her room whenever she

Writer Colin Welland and John Schlesinger on location in Yorkshire for 'Yanks'. Photograph: George Whitear



had a free hour and had overslept. With the prizes not yet allocated, she didn't feel free to discuss her reactions to any of the specific films in competition, though she did give vent to irritation at certain stylised films aiming at psychological realism which combine a maximum of close-ups with a minimum of dialogue. 'People in a dramatic situation, such as somebody stabbed to death on the floor, who simply stand there and look at the corpse for about 30 seconds—there's nothing practical, no dialogue. You finally think that the actors must have taken sleeping pills.'

Turning the conversation to film-making in a more energetic vein, I asked if she'd been offended by the way Claude Miller had drastically changed the deaths in his version of *This Sweet Sickness*. Highsmith, I was surprised to learn, does not see her novels as particularly dramatic scenarios: 'I find—to make a very large, general statement—that film-makers often have to alter my books a great deal, because so much of them consists of internal action which they can't get across on the screen. The need to make major changes in the plot of course goes as far back as Hitchcock with *Strangers on a Train*. He just could not make the second murder convincing, because he couldn't show the internal pressure on the so-called nice young man. So he simply had to eliminate it.'

Pat Highsmith was equally sanguine about the changes Wenders had made in the style and character of Tom Ripley, though she did admit that she herself 'never saw Ripley as wearing Levis or a Stetson hat or liking the juke box. My Ripley is striving to be a gentleman: he really hangs on to the trappings of bourgeois life.' Indeed, her Ripley was one reason she'd accepted the Berlin invitation in the first place. On a visit to the city two years previously, she'd been particularly struck by Grünewald and the forests: 'I thought there would be plenty of opportunity to kidnap someone there.' Undeterred by the fact that life had in this case anticipated art (a diplomat was kidnapped there last year), she was continuing work on a new novel, *The Boy Who Followed Ripley*, to be set largely in Berlin. 'Although Ripley doesn't suffer from guilt the way a normal person would, assuming that a normal person had by now killed about eight people,' she does perceive a new moral nicety to Ripley's continuing amorality: 'He now kills the Mafia and people who need killing—which makes him rather the good guy.' A remark which she makes not as a cynic or a misanthrope, but in the spirit of someone 'interested in social justice.'

Given the revived interest in her as the film-makers' muse, I wondered if she was tempted to turn to film-making herself. The answer was an unequivocal 'no'. 'I'm unusually bad at dramatising or putting something on the stage, or even writing for television. I've absolutely no talent for it: I must have failed five or six times, even trying to put one of my own things on to television. I cannot see things the way they should be: it's



Micheál MacLiammóir as the caged Iago in Orson Welles' *Othello*

like a third or fourth dimension that I haven't got.' The missing dimension is not, however, something over which she is likely to lose any sleep. 'In my stage of life, I think I know what I can do and cannot do. It doesn't even touch me. I mean, what's the matter with sitting at the typewriter and turning out interesting books? That's enough for me.'

JAN DAWSON

MacLiammóir

Orson Welles once remarked that he looked a bit like something Beardsley would have drawn if they'd taken away his pencil sharpener. He was gaudy, epicene, a great big overblown rose who, as much as W.B. Yeats, the poet and playwright he most admired, stamped his personality as well as his art indelibly upon the Irish theatre. He believed himself to be the reincarnation of Oscar Wilde, and sailed the streets of Dublin like a Venetian gondola, panoplied in a long black cloak and full stage make-up. His artifice was his life; and his favourite tale of Sarah Bernhardt, whom he knew and loved, was of how she used to spirit-gum her ruffles to her wrists to make the folds stay perfect. His essence seemed to be of the theatre; yet Micheál MacLiammóir, actor, poet, playwright, designer, wit and raconteur in six languages, who died in Dublin on March 6 after several sieges of illness, made several lasting contributions to the cinema, including the training of screen actors of the calibre of Dan O'Herlihy, and had a considerable influence on the work of Orson Welles.

MacLiammóir began life as Alfred Willmore in 1900, in Cork. The family moved to London when he was ten, and he began his apprenticeship in the theatre under the tutelage of Beerbohm Tree with none other than Master Noël Coward, whom he quickly surpassed as a child star.

Like Welles, he maintained throughout his life that painting and not theatre was his first love. A gifted draughtsman and designer in the tradition of Bakst, he left the stage when his voice changed to study art in France; but was driven back to it by the untimely death of his beloved cousin Maire, also an artist. Rather than return to London, which he said reminded him of a large shrill peroxide blonde who had said all she had to say years ago, he joined the 'fit-up' company of his brother-in-law, the brilliant eccentric Anew McMaster, who also tutored Harold Pinter. It was in his own windswept, legend-haunted countryside, so like that which informed the German Expressionists, that Willmore Gaelicised his name, met his lifelong companion and business partner Hilton Edwards, and dreamed up the foundations of the Dublin Gate Theatre, which would rival and at times surpass the Abbey.

The golden era of the Irish national theatre was said to have ended when O'Casey exiled himself to London in fury at Yeats' rejection of *The Silver Tassie*; and young actors and playwrights found themselves stifled by its parochial naturalism and conservative Catholic morality. Edwards and MacLiammóir swept into Dublin, bringing the traditions and innovations of the European mainstream. Their aim was to present to the Irish public a theatre divorced from the national question, a theatre 'limited only by the limits of the imagination'. In their efforts to escape the conventions of the proscenium theatre they presented over a hundred plays in their first seven seasons; but quickly became identified with a peculiarly baroque form of Expressionism which integrated elements of exaggeration and grotesqueness in the Irish literary tradition with the then current craze for German Expressionism.

One of the discoveries of the first

seven seasons was 15-year-old Orson Welles, who arrived in Dublin on a donkey-cart in the summer of 1931 and demanded work at the Gate, saying he was an experienced actor from New York. He began his premature career as a character actor playing the Archduke to MacLiammóir's Jew Süß, and only left the Gate when they refused to let him play Othello at the ripe old age of seventeen. However, he became a lifelong friend and, when financial difficulties later dictated that Edwards and MacLiammóir spend part of the year abroad, made several tours with them, including the premiere of a jazz version of Goethe's *Faust* which featured a young black singer named Eartha Kitt, the filming of an almost unknown one-hour version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*; and, finally, the making of Welles' *Othello* (1951), to which MacLiammóir contributed the idea as well as his own magnificently Byzantine performance as a sexually impotent Iago. MacLiammóir's outrageous diary of *Othello*, *Put Money In Thy Purse*, is probably the most extensive document on the making of that film.

Welles has often pooh-poohed the critics who see a strong influence of German Expressionism in his work; but it is more than possible that he absorbed a great deal of it through MacLiammóir and Edwards, to whom he freely admits that he owes a good deal as a director. The 'stylistic balance between poetry and setting', noted by Joseph McBride in his book on Welles as the most vital of Welles' concerns, was also a major concern at the Gate. Although Ireland has never produced a film tradition to equal its theatre, it is not too far-fetched to postulate that Welles, when he left, carried some of the brooding intensity, the sense of the grotesque and the macabre that illuminate Irish Expressionism, from one medium into the other.

Welles spoke eloquently about his

late friend and master when reached for comment in the week of his death. Occasionally I had the strong impression that he was in fact speaking of himself, as his seem to be the only shoulders broad enough to inherit the mantle of the last of the great 19th century actor-managers.

'Micheál saw life in terms of story and drama. His base was really twenty years younger than himself, and that's what made him great. Any artist who belongs to his time must by definition be second-rate, a journalist. He was of course in the romantic tradition, the best Hamlet I ever saw, and a great clown. He would have dominated the English-speaking theatre if he would have ever chosen to leave Ireland. It was a real case of mad patriotism, the more so since Ireland is proverbial for neglecting her own.

'I don't think he would have done well in films because he wasn't interested in holding the mirror up to nature. He lived two lives, one a kind of fantasy in which he somehow replaced Sarah Bernhardt, the other whatever reality the theatre is. He was tremendously disciplined and easy to work with. He acted his best on a rainy Wednesday matinée. Everything he touched, he made better.'

It was after seeing MacLiammóir's Iago in an old print of *Othello* that Curtis Harrington cast him twenty years later in *What's the Matter with Helen?* (1971). (MacLiammóir also made one of his rare screen appearances a couple of years earlier in John Huston's *The Kremlin Letter*.) Harrington found him 'totally at home in front of the camera... an absolute professional'; possibly because the role, that of an ageing ham actor, 'fitted him like a glove'. 'I wanted an actor who could bring with him the feeling of a rich and colourful past. This was not something I expected to be "acted"; it was something the actor had to have, an innate quality. Micheál had it in abundance.'

Dan O'Herlihy, who was apprenticed under MacLiammóir at the Gate during the war years and who later played Macduff in Welles' *Macbeth*, mourned the passing of the era which also informed the genius of Welles and Olivier, figures whose grandeur links the cinema with the almost forgotten world of Garrick and Irving. 'Micheál came from an era where the theatre was the principal form of entertainment. There can't be anyone like him now, not in America, not in Ireland, not even in England. He was better at playing himself than at playing a role, as clever and witty as Wilde but with this great audience control that made him even more flamboyant. I think he was the great all round artistic genius of the century in Ireland. He wasn't remote like Yeats. People triggered him and he triggered people.'

Welles filmed MacLiammóir's last screen appearance, *An Introduction to the Making of Othello*, only last year. This hour-long documentary for German television was shown at the Berlin Festival a week before the actor's death. As he recalled his last meeting with the man who, perhaps more than anyone, is responsible for

the sense of poetry which enriches Welles' greatest films, his huge voice sounded sad and diminished, the voice of a species rapidly becoming extinct. 'It was in a bistro in Paris about a year ago. He and Hilton wandered in out of the rain and I said, "What the hell are you doing here?" and they said "Oh, we're on our way back to Dublin to do six plays." Their fifty years together are without precedent in the modern theatre. There's no similar achievement in my mind to compare to it.'

PATRICIA GOLDSTONE

The Fourth Channel

Publication of the long awaited government White Paper on the creation and control of the fourth television channel in Britain is expected to coincide with the appearance of this issue of SIGHT AND SOUND. At the time of writing, usually reliable sources confidently anticipate that the White Paper will propose the creation of a fourth channel on the lines of the Annan Committee's proposals for an Open Broadcasting Authority. The distinctive qualities of the OBA as recommended by Annan were that the new channel 'should encourage productions which say something new in new ways' and that these should include not only programmes commissioned by the OBA itself, but programmes from independent producers as well as suitable material from the existing ITV companies. The OBA would also be concerned with material connected with the Open University and have a general commitment to education. Crucially, it would be independent of the existing television services, and act more as a publisher of programme material provided by others.

The outstanding feature of the Annan proposals is their commit-

ment to new freedoms in broadcasting. Almost alone among the many bodies and pressure groups which have submitted proposals for the expansion of television in recent years, the Committee's proposals are clearly based on principles related to the creative, cultural and social development of the medium. The Annan proposals have been welcomed both by public opinion and by television practitioners frustrated by the increasingly cautious strait-jacket of the existing organisations.

Rumour has it that the expected pro-Annan line of the White Paper has only been achieved after some hard in-fighting in government circles. A vigorous campaign has been spearheaded by the I.T.C.A. (the trade association of the programme companies) to discredit Annan because of its confusion about how the OBA will be financed—the Committee proposed an indeterminate mix of block advertising, sponsorship and grants. A pro-OBA White Paper will be vigorously attacked by the same interests. As might be expected, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) have on the whole supported the programme contractors' case. They have, however, suggested a fourth channel scheduling group with its own full-time executive, and they are also committed to restricting the existing I.T.C.A. companies' domination and to giving access to independent producers and to educational material. Their proposals have attracted some support as a compromise.

A more thoroughgoing variant of the IBA's ideas has been advocated by the Association of Directors and Producers. Worried by the risks inherent in Annan's woolly financial proposals, they advocate a reconstituted IBA to administer the fourth channel, and a levy to pay for it from the existing I.T.C.A. companies, who would in turn have the right to sell

advertising on the new channel. For its part, the Association of Directors and Producers want a totally independent scheduling group with both financial and policy control over the channel's output. The problem with both the IBA and the ADP proposals is how far the new channel could be independent of its paymasters, who would in both cases ultimately be the existing I.T.C.A. companies. Phillip Whitehead M.P., a member of the Annan Committee, has pointed out that the ADP case rests finally on the assumption that the IBA can simultaneously run two channels with fundamentally different philosophies.

A further complicating factor is the attitude of the unions. The TUC supports Annan, and favours government funding of the new channel. The BBC staff union, the ABS, also endorses the Annan recommendations. But the ACTT, the union covering the technicians working in the ITV companies, has committed itself to supporting the creation of an ITV2 on the fourth channel, on the grounds that 'standards and opportunities are a function of resources available', although they would allow access to the work of 'approved independents'.

The last variable in the equation—and perhaps the most important—is political. The prospect of a general election means that the Labour government's commitment to the OBA can only be strategic. There is little chance of getting legislation through during the life of this parliament. On the other hand, a Labour commitment to one strategy for the fourth channel is liable to harden Conservative support for a contrary strategy. With the publication of the White Paper, battle commences—and it will last beyond the election. But the emergence of the Channel Four Group, campaigning for an OBA and dedicated to resisting both the ITV2 lobby and any compromise, however well intentioned, which would undermine the basis of the Annan proposals, means that the commercial companies and the IBA will no longer be able to make all the running. This new group has little money and skeletal organisation, but it does include leading authorities on the social and community impact of television and many of the brightest creative talents in film and television.

It remains the case that the British film industry is alive and well and living in television. The establishment of an OBA could have a hugely beneficial effect on indigenous film-making. Taken together with the possibility of a British Film Authority, the existence of an Open Broadcasting Authority could eventually lead to the sort of vigorous film industry which British filmmakers have only been able to envy in other countries. A new television channel, free of the institutional and financial domination of the existing organisations, would be one way of opening the door. The Channel Four Group is going to need all the support it can get if it is to win the fight for a new channel which offers something more than more of the same.

MICHAEL DARLOW

David Bowie and pig in David Hemmings' *'Just a Gigolo'*, filmed in Germany, and Marlene Dietrich's first film for fourteen years



TURNING POINTS: RUIZ/TRUFFAUT



'La Vocation Suspendue': Geneviève Mirisch, Pascal Bonitzer

Richard Roud

The two best French films I have seen in the past six months are *La Vocation Suspendue* and *La Chambre Verte*. The first is directed by a 36-year-old Chilean now living in Paris; he has made nine feature films, all of which are virtually unknown—except perhaps for *Tres Tristes Tigres*, which won the Grand Prix at Locarno in 1969. His name is Raul Ruiz. The second was made by a 46-year-old French director; he has made sixteen features, all of which are known the world over; his name is François Truffaut.

La Vocation Suspendue was produced by the National Audiovisual Institute (I.N.A.), but so far it has only been seen at the Paris Film Festival last October. This Kafka-esque government Institute, having produced the film, seems to have no interest whatever in releasing it in France or in exporting it abroad. The Truffaut film was produced by his own company and United Artists (France); it opened in the first week of April; business was not good.

If the two directors have little in common, their films have a good deal. Both mark turning points in the careers of their makers. Both ostensibly deal with subjects generally considered taboo in the French cinema: the Ruiz film with religion, the Truffaut with death. Both films are adaptations of works by writers considered to be 'difficult' in France; *La Vocation Suspendue* is an adaptation of a 'novel' by Pierre Klossowski, a 73-year-old writer of distant Polish origins (his brother is the well known figurative painter Balthus); the Truffaut film is 'based on themes by Henry James', a writer it has taken the French a long time to accept. In fact, *La Chambre Verte* is largely derived from the short story *The Altar of the Dead*, not one of James' most familiar works.

The ostensible subject of the Ruiz film is religion: indeed, the film takes place within

Roman Catholic monasteries, and it deals with ideological differences between the patriarchal Jesuits and the matriarchal partisans of the cult of the Virgin Mary. But when the book first appeared in 1950, it was hailed by the existentialist philosopher Merleau-Ponty, in his and Sartre's magazine *Les Temps Modernes*, as a work about all totalitarian societies. The Church being The Organisation, *par excellence*, any examination of its functioning is an analysis of the phenomena of bureaucracy and of dogmatism. Since the Church is a totalitarian system based not on violence or police tactics but rather on its free acceptance by its members, it is the most complete expression of the 'fascination of totalitarianism', that double fascination with discipline and with power. Ruiz, however, was unaware of this long forgotten article by Merleau-Ponty; he just

chanced upon the novel, characteristically while browsing in a bookshop. He was immediately fascinated by it because it reminded him of the struggles between the various Leftist groups in his native Chile before the fall of Allende. The Left and the Church seemed to share the same attitude, the same battle cry: in order to survive, any institution has to consider itself in the position of a besieged citadel. And, in the words of St. Augustine, 'In a besieged citadel, any dissident is treason.'

The Suspended Vocation, says Ruiz, is a double squaring of accounts: with the Church (he was formerly a student of theology), and with what he tactfully calls 'certain aspects of militant politics', i.e. doubtless the Communist party, but also, say, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and certainly the National Audiovisual Institute. (The crew of the film immediately made the connections between various characters in the book and the people who run the I.N.A.)

If the film has, then, a double application, it is also a double film. The novel by Klossowski pretended to be a revision of an earlier, ideologically suspect work; and the film is two films in one. The first, supposedly made in the 40s, is shot in black and white; the second, made now, is of course in colour. The two films are constantly intercut, and the hero, Jerome, is played by two different actors. So the film, a recounting of conspiracies within the Church, is also a conspiracy itself, and the spectator is allowed to draw his own conclusions, to choose whichever version he wants. This is not easy, because Klossowski/Ruiz is constantly pulling the rug out from under our feet; the photograph of the nun ravished by the Loyalists during the Spanish civil war turns out to be the carefully touched-up photograph of the mistress of Malagrida (Daniel Gélín), the painter who faked the photograph and who is now a monk—just as the prostitute is now a nun. Indeed, after two viewings, it is almost impossible to retell the 'story' of the film, because it is really the description of a *mechanism*, and the elements of plot are less important than the analysis of the way the Organisation works. In this sense, the book and the film can be compared to the writings of Kafka, where the 'plot' is always subservient to the Description of a Struggle or the description of a Penal Colony.

But *La Vocation Suspendue* has elements of the thriller as well as of the parable: a thriller in which the 'crime' can be simply the representation of St. Bernard in a painting of the Virgin. A crime, because St. Bernard did not believe in the Immaculate Conception. If this sounds like some of the ideological quarrels of the Stalinist era (when Trotsky had to be painted out of photographs, for example), it is no accident.

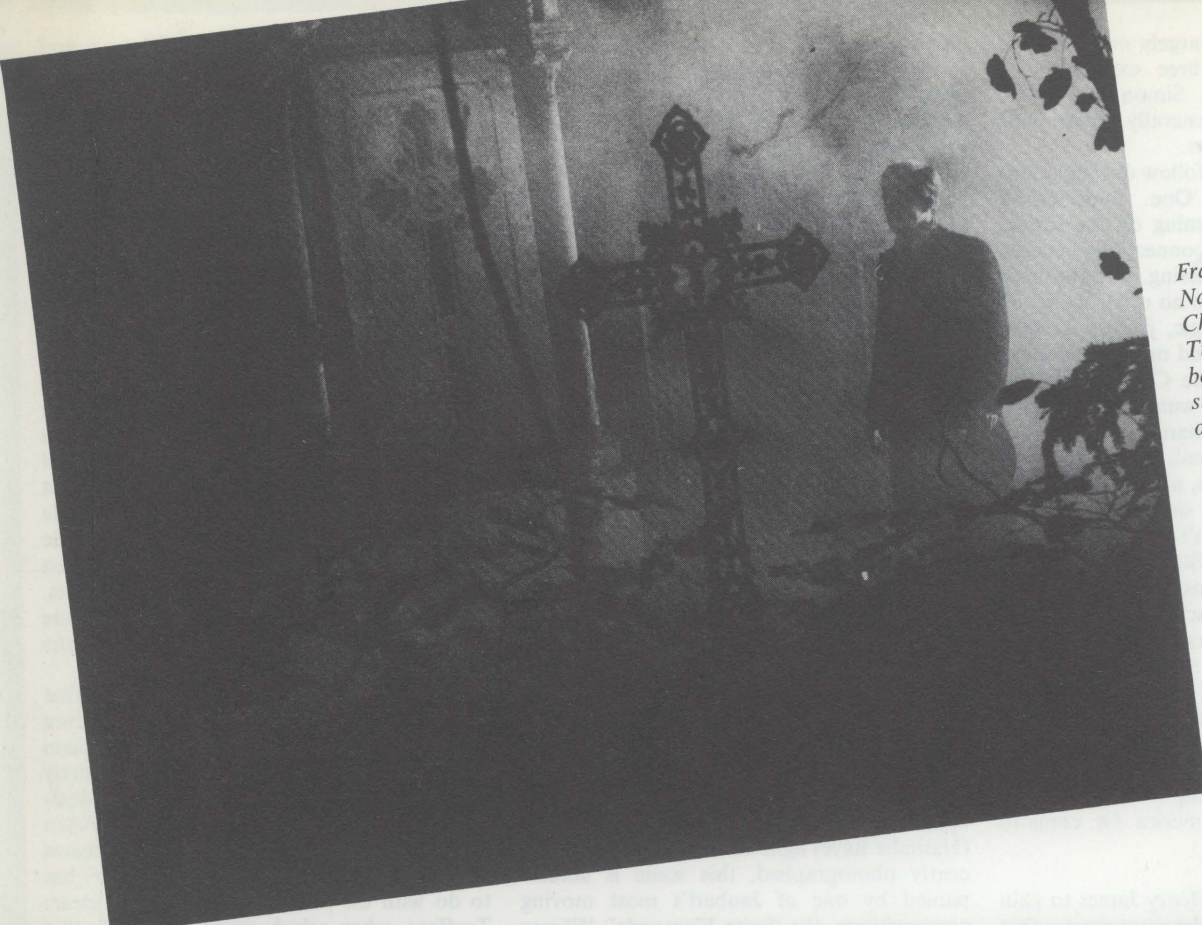
The film is a breakthrough for Ruiz because the material with which he is working is a great deal more complex than that of his more straightforward political films—like *Dialogues d'Exilés*, which dealt with the more basic problems of Chilean exiles in Paris, problems like earning a living and plain survival. But the new film is also different because it had a much bigger budget (thanks, it must be said, to I.N.A.). Money alone, God knows, is not enough to ensure good film-making, but it did allow Ruiz to secure the services of Sacha Vierny as lighting cameraman, and that made a world of

Truffaut's



LA CHAMBRE VERTE





François Truffaut and
Nathalie Baye in 'La
Chambre Verte',
Truffaut's new film
based on Henry James'
story 'The Altar
of the Dead'



difference. The cast is largely composed of unknowns, with the three exceptions of Daniel Gélin, François Simon and Edith Scob, but the acting is generally superb in its slightly Straubian manner.

The film is difficult to follow during its first quarter of an hour. One 'understands' everything that is happening on the screen, scene by scene, but the connections between the scenes seem to be missing. But gradually one gets hooked (there is no other word) on the film's surrealistic logic, just as its hero Jerome becomes more and more involved in the surrealist logic of the Church. And we soon realise that we are watching, as I said, the description of a mechanism. Again as in Kafka, the style is minimal, or seemingly so. There are no great scenes, no bravura effects, just an almost total simplicity of film language. The film doesn't look like Bresson and it doesn't look like Straub, but the very fact that I say this means that, in a way, it does. Simplicity, under-acting, and 'straight' photography play the same role as simplicity of language in Kafka: that of intensifying both the surface drama and the allegorical import. Twenty-eight years after its publication, the novel by Klossowski has still to be translated into English. One can only hope that it won't take that long for Ruiz' film to be seen in Britain and America. Or, come to that, in France.

It took a long time for Henry James to gain acceptance in France as the great master that he is. When I mentioned him to French friends, the usual response used to be, 'We have Proust; we don't need James.' All that has changed in recent years; perhaps the fact that James is now in the public domain has encouraged some publishers to take a chance (no royalties to pay), and every year three or four new titles appear in translation. (Logically, but startlingly, *The Bostonians* is called *Les Bostoniennes*.) So it is not surprising that, omnivorous reader that he is, Truffaut has now (after Chabrol, it must be said) discovered Henry James. What is surprising at first glance is that he should choose *The Altar of the Dead*. At first glance only, for has he not always been obsessed with... obsessions of every kind? The obsession of Adèle H. with her wayward lover, the obsession of Julie with revenge in *The Bride Wore Black*, the obsession of Belmondo with the Catherine Deneuve character in *Mississippi Mermaid*. The obsession of Julien Davenne in *La Chambre Verte*, however, is with death. Has Truffaut now reached the age when, as Davenne says, 'One knows as many dead people as living ones'? And has he reached that stage in his professional career when he feels he can afford to take a major commercial chance? *La Chambre Verte* is not going to make as much money as *Small Change* or *The Man Who Loved Women*, let alone *Day for Night*. But it is one of Truffaut's very best films.

If the subject matter is new, there are still many points of contact with his other films: once again the music is by Maurice Jaubert (as in *Adèle H.* and *The Man Who Loved Women*); once more his cameraman is Nestor Almendros; once more he plays the leading role himself (as in *L'Enfant Sauvage*). And, once again, the (absent) heroine, Julien's dead wife, is called Julie. That is the first major change from the original James story: in *The Altar of the Dead*, Stransom was mourning

his dead fiancée; here it is a wife who died shortly after their marriage. The scene has been shifted from London to a small town in Eastern France, and the time is 1928, ten years after the war that was fought in the surrounding countryside. Stransom 'had perhaps not more losses than most men, but he had counted his losses more; he hadn't seen death more closely, but had in a manner felt it more deeply. He had formed little by little the habit of numbering his Dead; it had come to him early in life that there was something one had to do for them.' But Julien has seen death more closely: the first sequence of the film is made up of tinted World War I footage, from which slowly, through superimposition, the face of Julien emerges out of the mass of soldiers.

Other elements in the original story are fleshed out by Truffaut into a subplot, like Stransom's meeting with a man who wants to introduce him to his wife—but whom Stransom regards as an impostor: 'That new woman, that hired performer, Mrs. Creston?' For him there could only be one Mrs. Creston, and she is dead. There are other changes, too. Leon Edel said that the story is 'an eerie tale, flimsy in its materials, yet written in great soaring organ-tones.' The organ-tones are in the film, most notably in the great sequence in which Julien and Cécilia (Nathalie Baye) light all the candles; magnificently photographed, this scene is accompanied by one of Jaubert's most moving compositions, the 'Suite Flamande'. 'Flimsy in its materials'? Truffaut apparently agreed, for he has added a significant new element to the original story. Cécilia, the woman who joins Julien in his cult for the dead, takes a different attitude towards them. You love the dead against the living, she says, and this is borne out by his refusal to accept among 'his' dead the former friend who had betrayed him, and who had done 'worse' to Cécilia. He made us both suffer, she says, but I have forgiven him. Can't you? No, he can't, and from his refusal to accept the faithless friend, among his dead, comes his refusal to accept the love of the living woman.

This is not quite how Henry James saw it. For him, the relationship between Stransom and the woman (she is never even given a name) is merely an intense kind of friendship. But Truffaut seems to have taken a page from *The Beast in the Jungle*, for in the film Cécilia is in love with Julien. 'I love you,' she says, 'but I'll have to die first before you'll love me.' Instead, it is he who dies first without ever having lived, his cult of the dead having extinguished his power to love. Only at the moment of his death does Julien realise that he has passed love by without even seeing it. What has happened is that nothing has happened.

James did place *The Beast in the Jungle* immediately after *The Altar of the Dead* in the New York edition, even though they had originally been published in different volumes. He did this, he says in the preface to the volume, 'to place like with like'. Both stories were about 'poor sensitive gentlemen'. The hero of *The Beast in the Jungle* has let everything pass him by because he has always been looking forward to some great event, because he has felt destined for some peculiar fate. Truffaut has conflated the two sensitive gentlemen into one, but James had given him the clue: ultimately, both heroes are selfish.

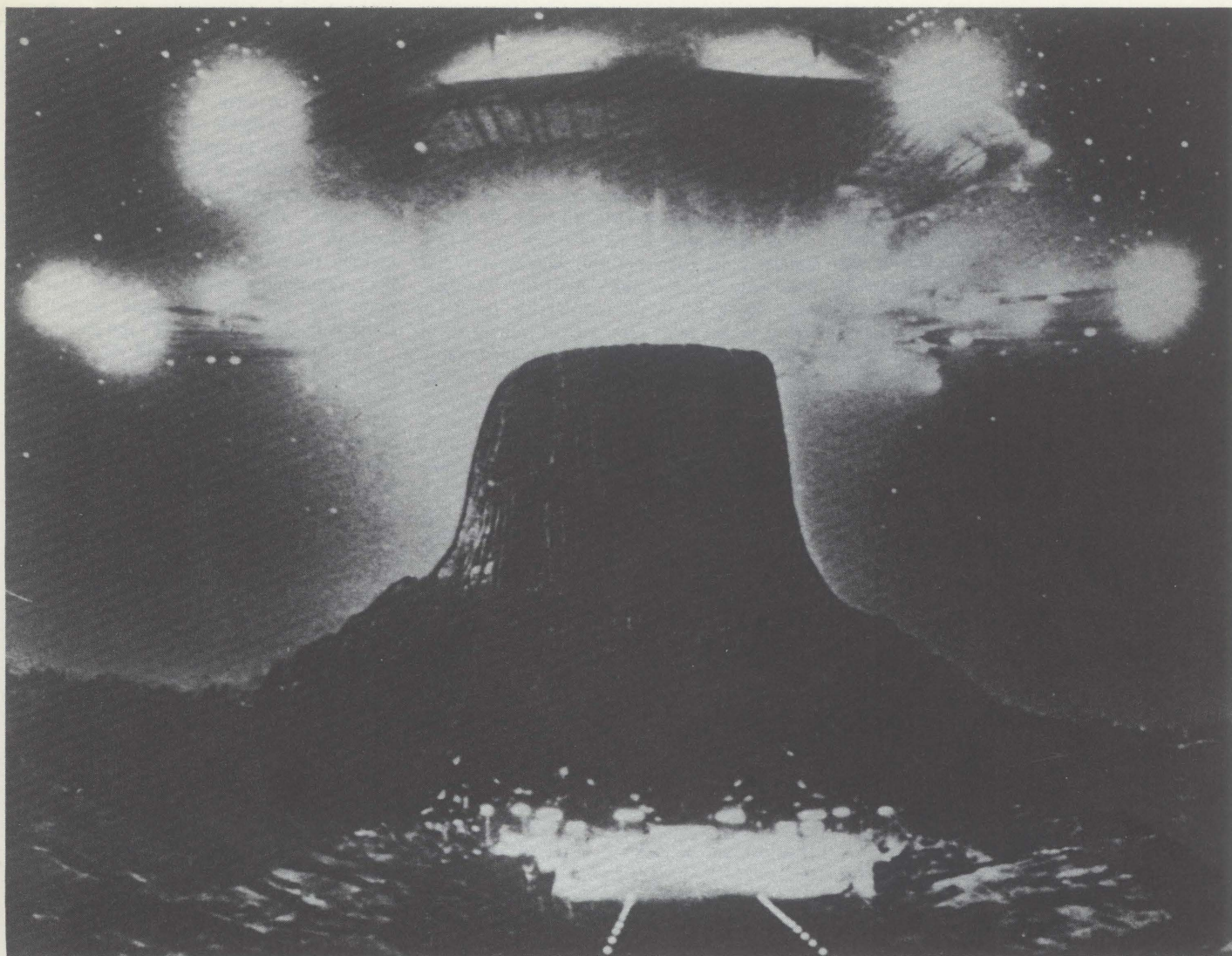
Stransom is only interested in 'his' dead, and indeed, 'There were hours at which he almost caught himself wishing that certain of his friends would now die, that he might establish with them, in this manner, a connection more charming than, as it happened, it was possible to enjoy with them in life.' Can selfishness and egocentricity go any further?

As befits its subject matter, *La Chambre Verte* has quite a different look from Truffaut's other films. The tones are sombre, it is always raining, and the cemetery, dank and overgrown, is shot in an absolutely English shade of green. The esteem Truffaut has always expressed for Bresson is more visible than usual, especially in his own performance. It is a real performance—not like the one he gave in *Close Encounters*—but it is a very distanced and distancing one. He speaks abruptly, almost telegraphically. He (and the other characters) are often seen through panes of glass or in mirrors. Distance, again, in the chapel scene, where the wrought-iron grill separates the actors from the camera—and from us.

But there are other elements in the film that could only come from Truffaut—even though he says that he is unable to explain them. He has given Julien an elderly housekeeper who is the guardian of a deaf-mute little boy, and the scenes between Julien and the child are not unlike certain sequences in *L'Enfant Sauvage*. What the little boy has to do with the rest of the film is not clear: Truffaut, when asked, could only reply that he felt the child had to be there for 'reasons of balance'. I suppose what he means is that the presence of a young child, unthinkable in the James story, is an element which, to use Lindsay Anderson's timeworn phrase, 'speaks up for life'. But, and this is characteristic of Truffaut's fundamental honesty, he can speak up only with the greatest difficulty; supplementing sign language with a series of strangled syllables.

If the Ruiz film is not really about religion, Truffaut's film is not really about death. Rather it is about death-in-life, about love and death, with love as the only 'answer' to death. Death conceived of as selfishness, the refusal ever to let go of what once belonged to one; the refusal to accept love and friendship unless the lover or friend is safely dead—and therefore totally manageable. Just as Julien can never forgive the wrong done him by his ex-friend, so that the betrayal has permanently embittered him, made him into what James called a 'spectator of life'; and spectators can never participate actively with the players in the game of life.

'The escape would have been to love her; then, then he would have lived. She had lived—who could say now with what passion?—since she had loved him for himself. Whereas he had never thought of her... but in the chill of his egotism and the light of her use.' These words from *The Beast in the Jungle* sum up the meaning of the film Truffaut has made, and the fact that the film is far from being unworthy of these magnificent phrases—these organ-tones—means to me that Truffaut, with a leg up from Henry James, has surpassed everything he has done until now. And that one need no longer have apprehensions for his future; the man who made *La Chambre Verte* is never likely to fall back again to the level of *Domicile Conjugal*. ■



CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FOURTH KIND

White on black on silence. The pared-down, spare titles of Steven Spielberg's science fiction epic grow tense with premonition as a high-strung, portentous chord masses behind them, swells to the breaking point, and rends the darkness into a dust-drenched sunburst on the Sonora desert. Light and sound synaesthetically wired to each other—movieness itself in a fission-like concentration—spark to life this imperfect but exuberant film and charge it en route towards its already legendary finale, a cosmic light show aglow with spiritual illumination. It is only right, too, that in the first image which ignites the screen we have only the prime matter of sight, a suffusion of muted brightness, so thick with veiling dust that there is for a few seconds nothing really to discern. Mysteries, like screen images, may take time to resolve into focus.

Spielberg's main plot gets under way when Roy Neary, a hard-hat with an Indiana power company (Richard Dreyfuss, skilfully alternating throughout between crazed fascination and frustrated rage), receives a skin-singeing blast of unearthly light. He is thus stigmatised along with others in the community, especially Jillian Guiler (guilelessly played by Melinda Dillon halfway between protective maternity and childish acceptance) and her son Barry (the scene-stealing, cherubic Cary Guffey). Neary, his own name nicely tuned to the proximity of revelation, tries hard to return to his normal suburban life after the momentary vision, in

order to accommodate the increasingly peevish incredulity of his wife (Terri Garr). But even when his sunburn from another solar system begins to fade, Roy still bears a noble psychic wound that has scarred over with an unseen ripple on the brain, a fold in the imagination struggling to unfold into prophetic shape. It is a cosmic calling card. R.S.V.P.

It is the same, we learn, with all those who have had close sightings of the extraterrestrial interlopers. All try to picture in one plastic form or another a truncated conical shape they have had cauterised on their mind's eyes, until finally the electronic medium of film, on

Garrett Stewart

Above: 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind': spaceship landing at the Devil's Tower

a network newscast, corroborates and specifies its location. Some paint or sketch it; the child Barry tries to make it come true in a large mound of mud, and later plays a melody also implanted in his brain, an astral code, on his toy xylophone; Roy tries to sculpt his vision, first in shaving cream and mashed potatoes, later in children's clay, and finally by uprooting the materials of his very life and reassembling them, yard plants, upside-down garbage can and all. The mentally engraved shape turns out to be Devil's Tower in Wyoming, and upon this location converges a team of international scientists (headed by François Truffaut as Lacombe) to await the cosmic reconnoitring party that has invited them there by radio transmissions. Fighting their own way to the mountain, Roy and Jillian draw the second half of Spielberg's plot over much rough ground, as well as some incontestable highspots, toward the director's own pinnacle of science fiction wizardry. Without the steely perfection or visual profundity of Kubrick's *2001*, Spielberg's rousing entertainment is easily the next most impressive venture in the film art of science fiction. Kubrick was out for apocalypse, Spielberg only for epiphany. Yet more is revealed than the cosmic visitation, for even more obviously than in Kubrick's masterpiece, *Close Encounters* offers a multiple comment on the genre in which Spielberg is working, the gifts he brings to it and their imaginative nurture in other genres, other film and fictional outlets for the imagination.



The most resolutely popular of the successful young directors has given us the apotheosis of his own devoted audience, his Everyman, with the ordinary middle-American men and women whom we see struggling to shape the form of their destiny and that of their planet emerging as the director's personal stand-ins. Both victims and beneficiaries of their vision, all those tranced with its possibility become inarticulate spokesmen for the ineffable. Roy and his fellow travellers to the unknown embody the artistic drive itself, the compulsive attempt, out of whatever mysterious promptings, to realise an ideal in pigment or clay—or, of course, celluloid. Their wits smitten, their visions elevated, they are the medium, whatever their makeshift media, for a truth that will only be realised, fully visualised, by Spielberg's own manipulation of the film medium in the movie's final thunderous annunciation.

In just this vein of self-consciousness, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* seems to have made some special, not to say telepathic, contact with its reviewers. In the least likely places, what we might call the cinematic 'higher criticism' has reared its speculative head. Self-reflexiveness, cinematic sub-texts, distanciation, *hommage*: several of the mainstays of scholarly film exegesis are nodded to, albeit without the nomenclature, in a provocative and unprecedented way for such a clearly earmarked popular entertainment. Jack Kroll in *Newsweek* explores a revisionist allusion to Kubrick's epic, while cryptically calling the long climactic episode a 'film-within-the-film'. Frank Rich of *Time*, noting allusions to Hitchcock and Disney, also senses a self-referential fervour in the conclusion, 'a celebration not only of children's dreams but also of the movies that

help fuel those dreams'. Even Pauline Kael, champion of the augmented gut reaction, drifts into a rare fanciful moment that seems unlikely to say the least; guessing that Truffaut is there so that we will recognise him and recall his films, she adds in a dithering parenthesis that 'when, at last, he communicates with a visitor from above, there is a fleeting suggestion of Jean Renoir's lop-sided grin in the extraterrestrial's young-old face.'

Yet something seems at work in all this besides mere over-exertion. Almost as if the reviewers, like the film's hero and heroine, were stung by some unutterable intuition trying to get said, they are all tracing their approximations round a central point about *Close Encounters*. The inchoate desire on the part of these critics to register this movie as media event, to see it situating itself in a tradition, is induced, I suspect, in two ways: both subliminally, by the many miniature films within it, TV screenings that serve as microcosms, ironic or otherwise, of the surrounding movie (though these have not once been mentioned in early reviews); and, suprastructurally so to speak, by the movie's very existence as a late, and in many ways corrective, entry on the roster of that film genre perhaps most suggestively engaged with, because most obviously emerged from, the constituent mechanics of the medium.

Historical spectacles redevise the look of the past, reconceive it perhaps, but in the severest sense invent nothing. *Barry Lyndon*, even for its admirers, adds nothing new to any corner of the universe but the present to which its art is a debated contribution; the 18th century in which it is set, and not just because of Kubrick's embalmer's touch with the cast, remains in its grave, undisturbed. And even futuristic novels, because of their non-representational medium, are like mere *memories* of the future in reverse. They seem to remind us, by predictive nostalgia or admonition, where we haven't been yet. But futuristic films manufacture the future before our curious gaze. They are in a definitive sense inventive. Their replicas of the unseen, however miniaturised, magnify into view what might one day come, telescoping the future into technological presence at one remove. For over half a century before getting there, we had seen what it might look like to land on the moon, and at least by the time of *2001* (1968) the ontological urgency of science fiction had become clear. Kubrick's movie, in its technical mastery, is indistinguishable from almost anyone's imagination of machines in space. Our dreams, along with our nightmares, had been printed at last on celluloid with utter conviction. In one cinematic stroke we were also reminded how from its very inception science fiction—and not without a wink or two of self-conscious deliberation along the way—has tried to point us with its miraculous craft (both senses) straight to the roots of cinema as mechanical invention.



Almost a decade after *2001*, Spielberg's film continues to acknowledge the ways science fiction taps directly the springs of cinema: technological kinesis, simulated environments, imaginary vistas made visible. With its brilliant flooding and backlighting, especially in the blanching inferno of cosmic irradiation at the end, Spielberg's movie also draws self-

evidently upon the *sine qua non* of film imagery. The movie at its transfiguring extravagant climax is a 'film-within-the-film' in nothing so much as its spectacular lambency. The aliens announce themselves in light; all but invisible in the brilliance of their own aura, like seraphic presences, they are also what Stanley Kauffmann calls all film images: figures of light. Light plus sound to be exact: their double ambience, their medium. To the tune of a strange encoded melody, the aliens seem to come singing 'Fiat lux', summoning revelation from both the night sky and the darkened screen that projects it, each a visionary's *tabula rasa*.

The Starchild at the end of *2001* was heralded by Strauss chords he himself did not hear. The space pilots in *Star Wars* had no idea they were waging their intergalactic combat to the neo-Wagnerian bombast of John Williams' winning score. Spielberg, however, has braved the revolutionary effect of incorporating his score, as film structuralists would say, into the 'diegesis', the credited universe of the film's fictional present. Everyone in Spielberg's movie-within-the-movie listens for a good while, spellbound, to the movie's own staccato soundtrack, for it is by these celestial grace notes turned cinematic accompaniment that they have tracked their vision to the dazzling rendezvous. The first mention of an extraterrestrial sighting melds light and sound in a figure of speech which sounds a keynote later to be orchestrated full-scale in the film's climax. 'The sun came out last night,' says the dazed old man on the desert, and 'it sang to me.' Light articulates the marvellous as melody, which is only a standard cinematic harmonising of light and sound raised to the power of technological astonishment.

But falteringly raised at that. Just when the film spreads its wings to their full metaphysical reach, it is somehow most flawed and poorly thought out. Blandly disbelieving or later woodenly wonderstruck, Spielberg's poorly cast scientists, astronauts and politicians manage to dehumanise the intoxicating spectacle of the finish. Not caring to make his minor bureaucrats and army personnel a palpable threat, Spielberg has left them with nothing much to be or to do, and their flatness is one of those strategic miscalculations or missed chances that flow directly from the film's intent. Hedging the Kubrickian profundity with whimsical touches, but nevertheless placing his best bets on big effects. Spielberg lets the dialogue get short-changed. Principals excepted, the die is cast with indifferently selected bit players, and the cast dies left and right, especially when plot thickens and interest thins towards the climax, with no lines worth breathing life into and only the tenuous ozone of bedazzlement to inhale. With every opposite purpose in mind, Spielberg's people end up as faceless as in Kubrick's satiric vision of human vitality atrophied to the brink of extinction.

The Truffaut character is a special problem. It is hard to imagine him spearheading the experimental battalion gathered at Devil's Tower. Suave geniality is not a quality the film needs when it needs the Lacombe figure, but rather acumen and keen prescience. Even though he works hard at looking mused and flabbergasted, Truffaut remains all couture and preciousness, elegantly bred in body and soul, spruced for a tête-à-tête with infinity. Going out of his way to cast a famous French

director in a 'directorial' role is a gesture of cinematic self-consciousness which unhappily requires a translator. But except for Truffaut, Spielberg has so little interest in casting other members of the experimental team that the actor who plays Lacombe's linguistic middleman, bearded, looks enough like the Richard Dreyfuss of *Jaws* that we spend much of the dust-shrouded first scene thinking we are being introduced to the film's star. This character, Laughlin, had been a cartographer before being borrowed by Lacombe because he happened to know French. In a revealing overlap of abilities, he is later able to 'translate' the cosmic message being beamed to earth in terms of longitude and latitude. Still the insistence on translating Truffaut's speeches throughout the film, an idea obviously dear to Spielberg in its hints of universality and achieved communication, inevitably serves to distract and decelerate the plot at eventful turns.

Other minor annoyances and questions proliferate in a film which too often seems stitched together of loopholes and loose ends. Why are the few dozen scientists convened to hear recordings of the mysterious five-tone chant taped by Lacombe's team in India huddled together in the front rows of an enormous indoor stadium? And why are they suddenly reading their sign-language charts with small flashlights in the gradually darkened auditorium, when there is no footage being screened, only a tape played? Is it the theatrical nature of the experience, with Truffaut spotlighted on stage, that Spielberg wants to insinuate along the way as he moves towards the flamboyant staging of his overtly theatrical climax? Is it worth it? Why is the impact so muffled and confused in that obligatory scene where a mistaken sighting begins to discredit belief? The genre demands

such sidetracking moments, here caused by two helicopters assumed to be more alien craft, but it is badly managed by Spielberg, and transpires without a whiff of defeated faith. And why, once all doubts are dispelled, is Neary's selection for the space mission so elliptically treated? In an escalating climax so fondly protracted, why the misguided economy of exposition?

The sum impression of Spielberg's grand finale, subtracted from unquestionably by such defects, nevertheless tallies powerfully with his overarching themes. The climactic shots that work, that work wonders, are those in which we look on starry-eyed along with the scientists, the camera's frame filled to distraction with alighted marvels. But when we merely watch the spectators watching, the awe is oversold and devalued. This may suggest one reason, along with others, why science fiction films have naturally gravitated to the grotesque threats of visitation-as-invasion rather than to the chance of communion and transfiguring glory. We need to identify with the participants, and though consternation or terror fare well enough by proxy, ecstatic curiosity doesn't. Further, we are never enough in touch with the scientific operations to feel their inner rhythms, to know what almost anyone is busy at. With the cast beating time until epiphany, the awestruck degenerates to the dumbstruck, and even when revelation comes the scientists, stock-still, arms at sides, some with eyes blearily uplifted, some looking down, some unaccountably sideways, gawk blankly from behind dark glasses at the glare of discovery.

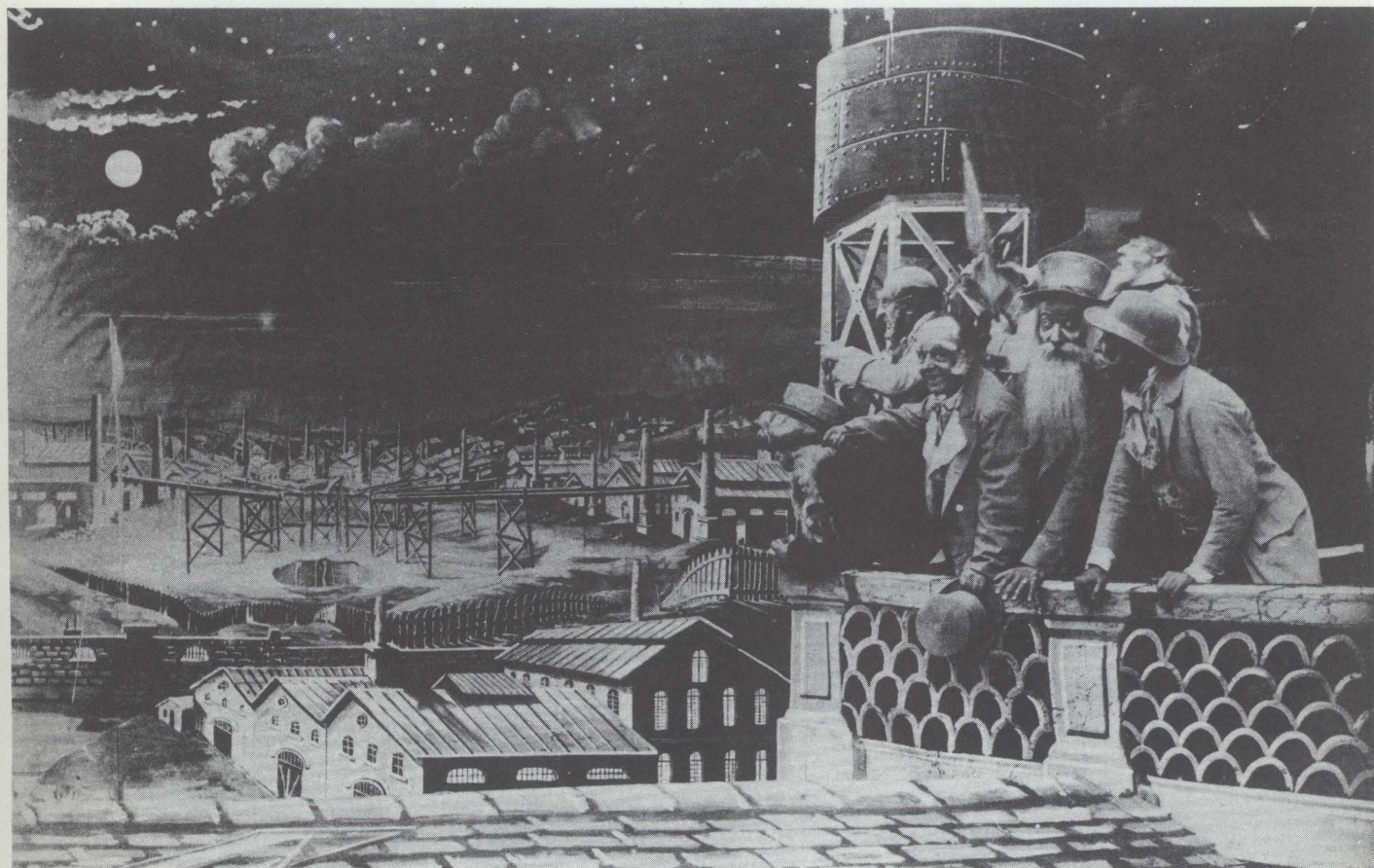
Kubrick's *2001* was about flying objects never really identified by man, about encounters never to be had by either apes or humans without transforming their very animal natures—about unsurvivable visita-

tion. On the contrary, Spielberg's optimism requires reaction shots, on our behalf, from his gathered faithful. Yet because wondrous events cannot be just told, but must be unfolded before our eyes, a sublimity visibly pondered by others must run the risk of blunting to redundancy our own encounters. Spielberg's slackened inventiveness fails his climax at its very heart, for it should not be about incredible splendours so much as about their cleansing reception. Though no such lapses in dialogue or logistics can defuse the impact of the special effects by Douglas Trumbull, Spielberg's genuine gusto and originality have been expended earlier, with those thematic preparations for the climax which seem tacitly to call up the history of fantasy film, including of course science fiction, as the theoretical meeting ground of cinematic technology and dream mechanisms. A meeting ground and also a proving ground for such interaction. This is a sense of Spielberg's epic best appreciated after some consideration of the genre and its prevalent self-consciousness. Exemplified by some of the richest movies in the canon of science fiction, the film of future technology often reflects back upon itself to become a comment on the technology of film.



It is no accident that what consensus takes to be the first signally important narrative film was simultaneously the first science fiction film, Méliès' 1902 *A Trip to the Moon*. Perhaps the first sustained self-referential film as well. The all but oxymoronic clash between contrastive modes of the imagination in the very rubric 'science fiction' is fully in keeping with the near paradox of the cinema's own mechanised aesthetic, the electronic workings

'A Trip to the Moon': the cinema's first space travellers and the industrial landscape they leave behind



of its manifold 'dream machine'. With the advent of film, technology for the first time in the history of art directly empowers the craft of storytelling. Further, by film's scientifically sired magicianship, even the as yet fictional advances of science can be foreseen, either to be dreaded or embraced. There is a technological self-consciousness implicit in science fiction cinema from the start, even an ironic and monitory wariness about wrongminded science going awry. There is a moment in *A Trip to the Moon* when the space pioneers, about to embark on their great flight of fancy as scientific fact, glance knowingly at the bleak industrial landscape of the new century, with its congested desolation. Science has brought man to such a pass that only more science, the mechanics of flight in both senses, can make restitution—a technological exodus from the blight of technology. The rescuing imagination is clearly shown to be the province of astronomer and film-maker alike, since Méliès appears in his own film as the head astronomer and lunar explorer, just as Truffaut the director will play the chief technological visionary for Spielberg: the cinematic mage as scientific mastermind. After all, the new aesthetic of the cinematic medium offers as much chance as does rocketry for reprieve, imaginative release from the baleful excesses of terrestrial mechanisation.

Even Méliès' flamboyant special effects take self-conscious stock of themselves as the incipient vocabulary of film narrative at large. When the alien creatures who beset the spacemen are instantaneously pummelled into oblivion as if by a magic wand, this laboratory trick, cousin to the stage magic of Méliès' trade before he turned to film, tells us more about cinematic editing and its devious versatilities, and is meant to, than about any imagined interplanetary combat. Evaporation translates to cutting—as if, once out of this world, the universe might obey the dreamlike laws of film itself. Two decades later, René Clair's *Paris Qui Dort* (1923) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) continue to entertain the ironies of cinematic vocabulary as futuristic device, and in the fourth decade of the cinematic century, William Cameron

Menzies' *Things to Come* (1936), engages further in a baroque disquisition upon moving-picture technology as either futile escapism or forthright tool of futurity.

The mechanised aptitudes of the new medium and the stage magic from which Méliès came to it conspire neatly and without threat in his ground-breaking *jeu d'esprit*, as do the mechanical high jinks and fantastic conjectures of Clair's whimsical *Paris Qui Dort*, from a script originally titled *Le Rayon Magique* and released under the English title *The Crazy Ray*. By a marvellous and potent beam not unlike the cinema's own rays of light, Parisians are stopped cold in their tracks, frozen by a magic force allied to, and of course derived from in its portrayal, the standard cinematic punctuation of stop-action frames, as if real human time was subject to a film editor's scissors and tape.

Three years later in cinema history, Fritz Lang had elevated—or levelled—such self-referential farce to prophetic trepidation. If a real scientist in a real laboratory could possibly tamper with and transform reality the way an editor or director can its second-hand representation, then a spurious demiurge has come again. Rotwang the scientist in *Metropolis* is such a technological villain, with a name that rhymes with his director's; costumed like a medieval alchemist, as indeed Méliès and his fellow astronomers were robed and hatted like so many latter-day Merlins in the first scene of *A Trip to the Moon*, Rotwang is a treacherous wizard in a future necropolis of scientific subjugation. Leo Braudy has at one level seen the self-referential elements of Rotwang's conception: 'Rotwang is a paradigm of the film director, who attempts to mix scientific knowledge with the primeval magic of artistic creativity.* His most heinous scheme, at the behest of the rulers, is to simulate the evangelical heroine of the lower orders, the saintly Maria, with a technological fabrication. He begins with a steel robot and metamorphoses it into a fleshly android, by an electromagnetic alchemy that is transparently the work of cinematic super-

* Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp 7-8.

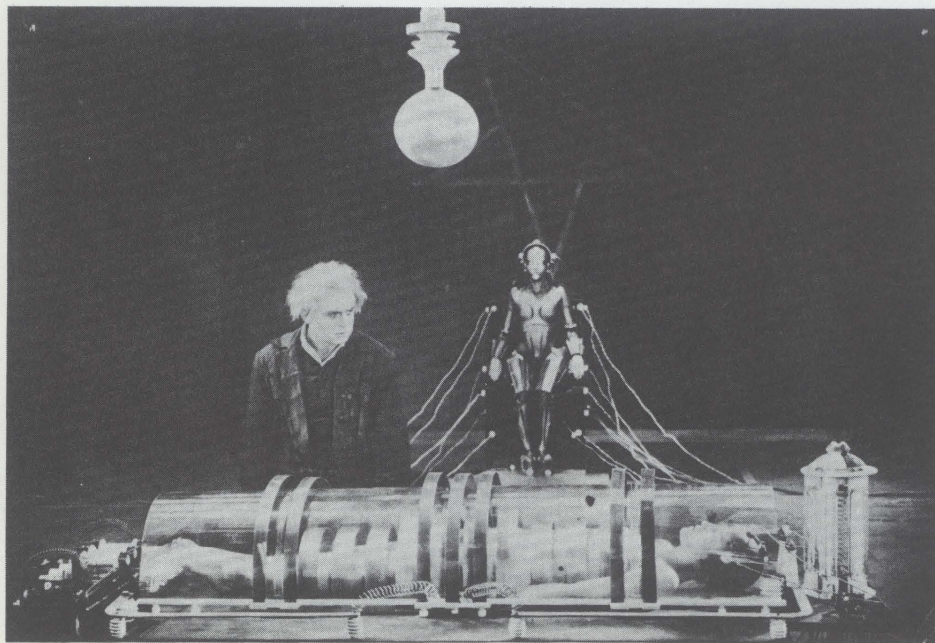
imposition. Amid a splutter of galvanic voltage, the robot is overlapped with an image of Maria, who becomes her own celluloid double. As false prophetess of the labour force she has become an obscene *dea ex machina*, a technological mirage possible only to a film-maker—or of course to a satanically gifted scientist. The scientific recourse of a repressive state is merely the visual resource of the cinema writ devilishly real. In the quarter century from Méliès to Lang, we see how intimately tethered science fiction has become to the mechanical springs of the cinema itself, whether the essential vocabulary of film discourse—dissolves, superimposition, cuts, freeze frames—is converted to revolutionary invention or perverted to villainous device.

In another decade, wariness wends its way to celebration in that contemplative technocracy envisioned for the twenty-first century in the film version of H. G. Wells' *Things to Come*. The story opens in Everytown on the eve of an internecine world war, and speeds us through generations of carnage toward the 2036 renaissance of Everytown downunder, a subterranean city-state ruled by masterminds of technological progress. This telescoped chronicle of our technological posterity was planned by Wells and executed by his director, Menzies, as a ringing antithesis to Lang's supposed paranoia in *Metropolis* about scientific advance and social planning.

With the exception of a moon rocket and a few innocuous transport vehicles, the primary machine we are shown in this glance forward into our own healing technological destiny is the cinema in its various future mutations. Even the enemy of scientific advance, the sculptor Theotocopolis, is permitted by the ruler of the gleaming technocracy to broadcast his petty tirade against the state via the video airwaves, conceived just before the advent of television, that unify the state and fulfil its scientific promise. The enemy of science appears multiplied through the courtesy of its own technological miracles on a series of variously sized plexiglass rectangles shown to us in rapid montage, even in a hologram-like incarnation in a viewing tube. The security and generosity of democratised science is such that it can invite its own vilification, providing as it does so its own most eloquent defence. My doctrinaire plot summary is not meant to sound brainwashed, for none of this quite comes off. Art for art's sake is, to be sure, not well bespoken, but the technocrats are arch and stiff and fulsomely humanistic, and their coolly perfect world seems chilled to the bone. Even the painstaking antisepsis of the swollen Great White Set from the heyday of the Hollywood comedies, for which Menzies was a famous designer, becomes here an uninviting study in the instant futurism of Deco as unintentionally ironic clairvoyance.

When the earliest bombs of the war spill down on Everytown, it is the cinema that is the first building to go. Like the soporific 'Sleeping Beauty' Christmas pageant at the nearby legitimate theatre, the cinema whose marquee has been blotted out in a low-angled, high-principled shot by a 'War Scare' poster is also an opiate of the people, who are narcotised by its 'dream machine' to the coming holocaust. Such fictional cinema must be obliterated, to resurface not as escapist trivia but as didactic tool. 'Pictures' on plexiglass have a century later replaced

'Metropolis': Rotwang, the treacherous wizard, creating the false Maria



history books, and a young girl studies film images of the New York skyline, explained to her by her doddering grandfather as mementoes from the 'Age of Windows'. With no vantage on the natural world, buried beneath the earth's surface and communicating with both past and present by reproduced images, the world of Everytown we glimpse by the agency of cinema might instead be called the 'Age of Screens'. The misuse of media technology, scourged, has reasserted itself purified, with a stringency of imaginative latitude that is as far from Spielberg's later purposes as the genre can get. The media motifs of *Close Encounters* remind us instead that science begins as fiction. Tall tales exalt, awakening us to fantastic possibilities which reality may at any time duplicate or outdo, and which might, were we not alerted to them by popular art, go unheeded.



Two decades after *Things to Come* and we were still going to the movies to go to the moon. And when the moon looked as if it were shortly to be netted by technology in scientific fact, suddenly film's version of outer space began to reciprocate our inroads. Many of the films in this most prolific decade for science fiction hark back to the more ominous side of Wells' imagination, as evidenced by the invaders in *The War of the Worlds* (filmed appropriately in the year 1953 by Byron Haskin). Much has been said about the warping of science fiction themes by the 50s threat of technological obliteration, and in the second year of that decade Robert Wise temporarily halted the film history of science fiction in its exploratory tracks with *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Outer space began to explore us. A harbinger of its era, Wise's film is aimed at the fear of atomic proliferation even into space. But the terror of invasion is ironically overturned when the aliens come instead to urge our own disarmament, a galactic police force disembarking from an imposing mother ship in a set to which Spielberg may be consciously alluding with the light-flooded aperture and ramp of his own giant vessel. In Wise's film the visitors offer an ultimatum of peace, while in Spielberg's there is a transcendental peace negotiated without threat, a 'humane' accord.

Two years after *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the director of *Things to Come*, with its generous prognosis for interplanetary exploration, had capitulated to the new science fiction sensibility and mounted one of the most characteristic genre pictures of the McCarthyite era, *Invaders from Mars* (1953). A boy falls asleep, is awakened by unspeakable terrors perpetrated by Martian aliens, quite literally an 'underground' operation of perverse scientific expertise, only to wake again as if it had all been a nightmare and then find the experience starting over again for real. Cinema is itself like a recurrent objectified dream, and Menzies has gone back to the fantastic origins of cinema as projections of a dreamlike and at times nightmarish consciousness to cement our sense of this. Maybe we too will wake from the darkened cave of our movie auditorium into a coming-true of such traumatic invasions. Film's technology again posts a warning against the possible reality of its own fictional effects.

Dream psychology, in its bonds with the



'Things to Come': in the bombing of Everytown, the cinema is the first building to go

aesthetic of cinema, takes a curious turn further inward for the much beloved *Forbidden Planet*, directed three years later by Fred Wilcox. We are not always under celestial siege in the 50s; there is still room for escapist plots and intergalactic missions, but in Wilcox's film the journey far beyond becomes a ferreting deep within, an ingrown pilgrimage into the recesses of the unconscious mind. The movie has often been noted as an extraterrestrial transplant of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with the scientific genius played by Walter Pidgeon as Prospero, Robbie the Robot as Ariel, and the primordial Caliban surfacing as a nemesis from the id. It is a movie that would seem to table the self-conscious technological preoccupation of much science fiction, until an atomic power source is discovered to be tapped by the brain itself. When the energy of an entire planet is linked into circuitry with the vengeful violence of the scientist's unconscious mind, what results is a technologically triggered nightmare—a devouring electromagnetic monster sketchily projected in thin air like a ghostly hologram—that resembles the transparent apparitions all films unleash from their dream machines.

This killing link between electromagnetic technology and revenge, between visual mechanisation and the machinations of unconscious desire, is forged again a decade later in Jack Smith's inept film rendering of a Ray Bradbury story in *The Illustrated Man* (1968), a story about the dangers of media technology in a viciously advanced form. In a morbid playroom of the future, a visual toy conjures real lions on an imaginary African veldt, as if it were a child's violent film matinée come true. We need movies, Spielberg might argue, for the containment of our dreams and nightmares, not for their incarnation. But this futuristic TV is plugged into the same id that generated the monster in *Forbidden Planet*. Here the children can set their dials for a whole illusory landscape that gains body as it is entered on faith, and whose fantasised lions finally devour their parents,

as HAL the computer tries to defend itself in 2001, in order to prevent disconnection of the machine.

Kubrick's film appeared in the same year as *The Illustrated Man*, and it too located its technological discontents, if not its deepest fears, in the area of media as well as computer science. In a movie often noted as a requiem for the old and an anthem for the new order of man, birthday greetings are transmitted by two-way videophone to the scientist's daughter on earth from the moonship and later, on the Jupiter mission, beamed to the mutely unresponsive astronaut. He stares wanly at the speaking images of his parents, just as the two astronauts together had eaten their synthetic dinner over TV trays before videotaped BBC interviews with themselves. Especially in the last case, it is clear that such lowly uses of the film medium, such superficial documentaries with their prepackaged and incomplete data, cannot approximate the sweeping revelations which Kubrick's genuinely visionary cinema eventuates and unravels before our heightened sense of sight.

Kubrick's subsequent futuristic film explores the other side of the reflexive cinematic coin from insufficient or outmoded video technology: the malign potential of its oversophistication. The first onscreen violence in the artifice of schematised violence which is *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) takes place aptly in a deserted theatre, and violent film footage, with the hero strapped into his theatre seat, becomes later the most obscene personal assault in the entire film. Alex's eyes are pried open to stare, hypnotised by drugs, at the kind of graphic widescreen bloodshed which Kubrick has strained in his own treatment to rarefy and choreograph for us. As in *A Clockwork Orange* as a whole, the *cinema vérité* of street-gang carnage and the Nazi concentration camp films that are screened by force for Alex embody the cathartic paradox of violence for the sake of non-violence. For Alex it serves only as a temporary emetic, the purgative resources of cinematic violence misused in a way Kubrick tries hard not to be

guilty of, both as false art and nefarious reverse psychology. The technology of cinema once again siphons off our dreams, in this case Alex's worst fantasies, placing them before him so as to turn them against him, and finally him against them.

In 1972, a lesser film by Boris Segal, *The Omega Man*, combines 60s nostalgia with dark prognosis. It is set in an America half a decade further on in its collision course with destruction, in a mid-70s landscape decimated by germ warfare. Charlton Heston, archetypal survivor even of the later disaster epics, is one of the last humans alive in an architecturally intact Los Angeles. He spends his leisure in part by rerunning a discovered print of *Woodstock*, that 1970 valediction to the counterculture, and chiming in with a hippie on screen who says that life is pointless if one is afraid to go out into the streets. Cinema becomes a time-capsule, recovering the past and its unattended warnings: a fascinating reversal of the prophesied media innovations which punctuate so many science fiction futures. The idea that one of the most honest and valuable cinematic records of our own era should carve out the future for us, should warn us of self-destruction even as it might herald a saving new order, is one of the rare soundings of this pro-cinematic note in science fiction before its massive orchestration in *Close Encounters*.

Video has an opposite, virulent effect on man—whether the coercive technological icons of a future state or the corrupting daily fare of our own television broadcasts—in two of the most interesting science fiction films of this decade before Spielberg's, George Lucas's *THX 1138* and Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. In order not to violate the decorum of its Pop compendium, the jet-propelled plot of *Star Wars* steered clear of self-reflexive perplexities, reaching directly out of the frame for a mass audience who might be distracted by any acknowledgment of that frame. Lucas could perhaps do this with aplomb because he had worked the reflexive impulse out of his system in *THX 1138* (1970), a recycled Orwellian warning about the spiritual depletions of a centralised future state. Our hazily lit glimpse into this future is often coterminous with the voyeuristic preying of a central computerised eye, Big Brother as a cinematic instru-

mentality that in turn, after optically snooping on the masses, projects back to them in phonebooth-like confessionals a video image of their Lord. At one point, however, a misfit illicitly strays into a central projection room where, as in the unveiling of the Wizard of Oz at his control panel, the artifice of video projection is discovered, with a giant photograph of the technological godhead propped up before the cameras. In other scenes the citizens of Lucas' future sit mesmerised before giant television screens, upon which life-sized hologram images move and speak. The ultimate punishment for anti-social behaviour seems to be the conversion of breathing creatures into just such opaque holograms, and so once again the darker imaginings of science fiction rewrite movie technology as denaturing threat.

Lucas' movie opens before its credits with a wry jostling of context, for we see without explanation a short black-and-white preview of the next instalment of a 'Buck Rogers' serial, with its stentorian anachronistic over-voice promising that what we are to see in the next episode will be merely our own technology escalated into the 21st century. What Lucas is also telling us by this integral 'trailer', this 'preview' as prologue, is that we are soon going to move through and beyond such outmoded fables of our future, the weak-minded optimism of these early comic-book 'projections', into the more unsettling truth about that futurity lurking latent in our midst. And in connection with the subsequent hologram projections dispensed by this treacherous future state, there is the ultimate reflexive implication that *THX 1138*, composed as a movie of its own 'figures of light', would be no more than another mindless pacifier of the masses if it did not take the dangers of such psychic suppression as its satiric theme—if, instead of being political art, it were mere hallucinatory diversion.

By video hallucinations of an even more trivial variety, the hero of Nicolas Roeg's masterfully shot *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1975) is pitifully diverted from his intergalactic mission. In connection with John Boorman's *Zardoz* as it reflects a trend in recent science fiction movies, Michael Wood has written that 'Science fiction here is no longer a theme or a worry, it is a springboard for an exercise in cinema. Much the same could be said of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.'

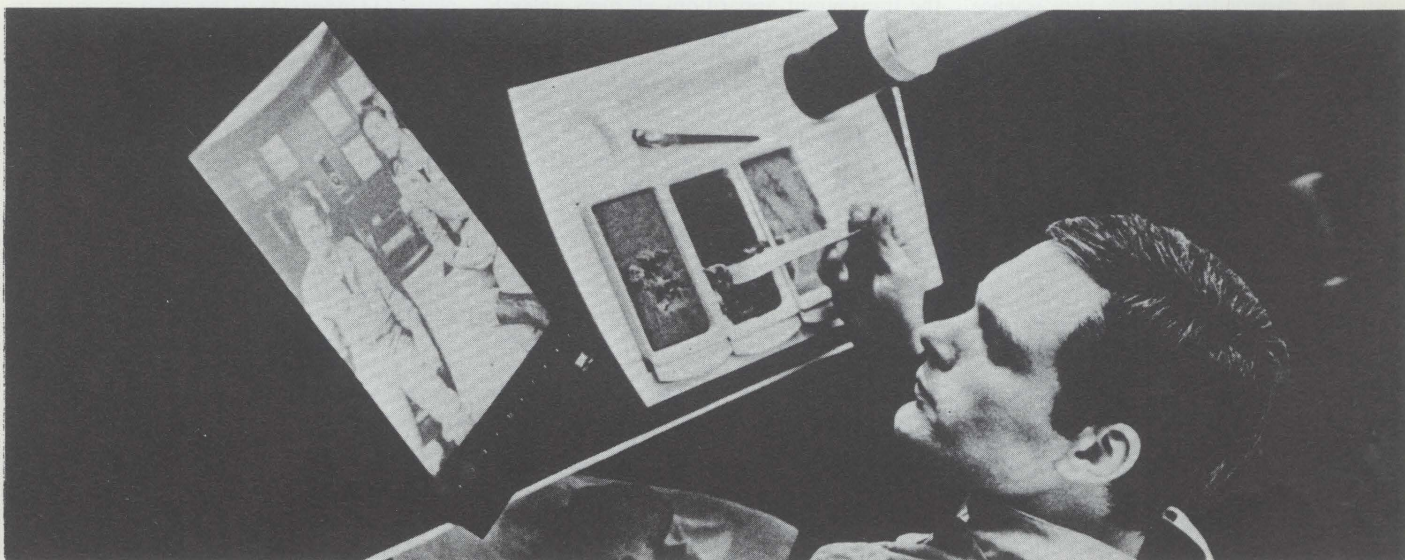
Much the same can also be said for *THX 1138*, but such movies, Roeg's most of all, are not only exercises in cinematic possibilities but troubled deliberations on the nature of media technology itself, either in the future they prophesy or the present they see defaced. Agreeing to wed the motel maid who is willing to bring him a number of television sets from other rooms, Roeg's spaceman drugs himself with their increasingly mindless images, obsessed with advertisements and pulp dramas. Roeg visualises what Spielberg rails against in his novelisation of *Close Encounters*: 'the silly, plastic normality of the TV sitcoms' that drone on in the background as Neary sculpts his mountain.

Roeg's spaceman slowly barricades himself from the real landscape of earth with banks of television sets which bring him, along with the commercial detritus, a few rerun feature films, one of particular note. Though he pays no attention, we see on one of his dozens of screens the climactic scene from the film version of Melville's sacrificial allegory, *Billy Budd*; as if it were rerunning with understanding the spaceman's own tragic career, it shows the execution scene of an innocent man slaughtered because his innate goodness is too unguarded for the alien world in which he finds himself. The ultimate double irony of the anti-media rancour in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is that if the spaceman had really watched his sets as closely as he watched his universal scanning screen at home, he might have found amid the trivia and hype, if only by accident, an artistic truth sufficient to save him. As in many films since *Things to Come*, the far flights of advanced video electronics are brought by Roeg into orbit with the current media output of our 20th century technology, whether in its reduction of reality or in its rare aesthetic comprehensions of it. Both sides of this present-day video analysis, the satiric and the celebratory, along with an all but inevitable convergence of the visionary expertise of the science-fiction film-maker with that amazing future technology he marshals his skills to approximate, are resonantly deployed in *Close Encounters*.



This galloping anthology of media thematics in the science fiction tradition is meant to help deepen our sense of the several films-within-

'2001': the astronaut at dinner, watching a videotaped interview



the-film of Spielberg's movie, which proliferate in tandem with another sub-theme: a gentle joking with American merchandising for which satire is too bitter a word, at least until the tentacles of materialism begin to strangle the visual media themselves in the sitcom and soap opera formats. The old man on the Sonora desert in the film's first scene has his revelation translated from Spanish into English into French under the neon script of a Coca-Cola sign above his head, advertising its universal product in the Esperanto of Consumerism. The shapes of American junk food provide the analogies closest to hand for the cosmic vehicles when they first appear to Roy, just as the term 'flying saucer' is of course also derived from such a reductive domestication of the unknown. Later the trucks carrying scientists to Devil's Tower are camouflaged with familiar advertising logos. In its easy humour about pop-culture commercialism, the movie often looks like a detoxified *Zabriskie Point*, or like slices of American life cut with the reverse side of Robert Altman's knife. And even the affectionate sarcasm vanishes for Spielberg's entirely unambivalent interest in one kind of consumer item—children's toys.

The expectant clash of cymbals with which a toy monkey at his bedside awakens Barry Guiler is surely, as *Newsweek* saw, an allusion to Kubrick's apes at the initial moment of ennobling contact in *2001*. Perhaps the most inspired single idea in *Close Encounters* is that toys should first intuit such encounters, the mechanical instruments of a child's objectified fantasy life responding promptly to the influx of cosmic energy around the bed of a sleeping child, as if (an idea used beautifully by Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend*) they were the child's dreams incarnate. The second toy we see is a mechanical Frankenstein who blushes red when his pants fall to his knees—the most famous of the screen's mechanically devised humanoids caught in a particularly humanising moment. Later, Barry's delightedly lisped sense that the alien machines are only outsized 'toys' in a 'train', come down to 'play' with him, reminds us of what we know to be true about their mechanical simulation by electronic miniatures on screen. Spielberg is thematically tooling up for his climax, when the director becomes a conceptual engineer for one of the most complicated twinkling erector sets ever devised.

Other machines of the imagination, along with more workaday appliances, are also activated by the alien force fields, including phonographs and television sets. On the evening of the first encounter, this strange energy starts spinning Barry's sing-song record about recognising the shape of a square. It is a didactic ditty by which a child is to be instructed in one of the simplest shapes of our Euclidian universe, but even as we hear it Barry finds himself in the throes of far more boggling recognitions. While Barry is waking to find his toys themselves awakened into fantastic activity, his mother's sleep is broken instead by a nondescript domestic drama suddenly engaged on her TV set, in which a couple discuss medical expenses and other humdrum business. Such media/ocrities merely interrupt, without interpreting, our dreams, and it is not until the activated fleet of toys rolls into Jillian's bedroom that her genuine curiosity is spurred.

We then cut to a close-up of Richard



'Close Encounters': Neary (Richard Dreyfuss), with his home-made mountain next to his television set

Dreyfuss amid the electronic maze of a toy railway, and we glimpse in passing, to clinch this inaugural clue about his mentality, a child's music box near the railroad draw-bridge, grinding out a tuneless version of 'When You Wish Upon a Star'. His wife calls him to the phone with a nickname, 'Jiminy Cricket', who sang this song in Disney's *Pinocchio*. This is the only remaining trace of a well-intentioned but tedious scene in Spielberg's novel, in which Roy fails to convince his children to join him at a revival screening of the Disney movie, which one of his boys calls 'some dumb cartoon rated G for kids'. Roy pleads with them by saying that the film 'has music and animals and magical stuff and things you'll remember for the rest of your lives', but they will have none of it.

In the film version Spielberg concentrates instead on the debate over whether the children can see the rest of a four-hour TV movie. Roy says he promised only that they could watch 'five commandments', and this mumbled joke, plus our single peek at the screen, lets us know that the marathon film in question is Cecil B. DeMille's epic of revelation, *The Ten Commandments*. What we see briefly on the screen is probably the most renowned special effect in film history before *2001*, Moses' parting of the Red Sea. Spielberg has such Biblical parallels much in mind, along with the cinema history of their presentation. Not only does his own triumphant epiphany occur on a mountain top, but it comes after an ominous rending of the heavens derived from DeMille's own battery of effects. The fugitive glimpse of *The Ten Commandments*, this second brief movie-within-the-movie after the colourless TV drama in Jillian's bedroom, thus rounds out to the glory of the equally revelatory epic that encloses it.

Such a reflexive subtext, Spielberg's unobtrusively spaced nexus of films-within-the-film, is not worked out in any too meticulous or dryly schematic way. As with the other outpourings of pop culture, it is there as a

media motif to ground the inestimable cinematic events to follow in the serio-comedy of daily life, anchoring unimaginable grandeur—or showing its daily analogues in other film fantasies of various sorts, from cartoon features to Biblical spectacles. When the Guiler household is invaded a second time by the aliens, a raucous Western chase scene briefly crackles into view and dissipates into static interference. Later, exhausted from his attempt to sculpt his strange mountain, Roy falls asleep staring at the imperfect clay incarnation of his bedevilling dream. He wakes the next morning, across a time-lapse shift of lighting, to the head-clearing sounds of his child watching a TV cartoon as if it were another visualisation of his dream, rethought now, for a few moments, as a childish delusion. The TV cartoon shows Daffy Duck stuttering about a 'thing from another world'.

In a tremor of recognition, Roy thinks he has discovered the folly of his absented adulthood and begins tearing down the UFO articles that paper his walls, activating in the process the tinkling sound of 'When You Wish Upon a Star' on his music box. As if he were being tolled back to himself through a musical intervention arranged by the aliens who need his obsession to make contact, Roy impulsively rips off the top of his clay mountain in a gesture of liberation, only to realise that the mesa he creates approximates more closely than ever before to the vision that torments him. His efforts to model it are now redoubled, and the scale and precision of his endeavours, with garbage cans and chicken wire and garden plants for miniaturised trees, achieves something of the persuasiveness of a cinematic special effect, an almost professional scale model of the sort Spielberg himself will later use for his climax.

There is a satiric side to Spielberg's use of films-within-films which was apparent as early as *The Sugarland Express* (1974). There too Vilmos Zsigmond (the chief cinematographer for *Close Encounters*) helped him shoot a scene in which a Roadrunner cartoon

from a drive-in is mirrored through automobile plate glass into the secret privacy of a trailer in a used-car lot, where the film's hero and heroine are hiding out from the police. Themselves emotional children road running in search of the girl's child, they live out violent fantasies of escape and vindication in a real world calculated to annihilate those dreams. The harmless comic violence of the Roadrunner on screen is thus an ironic exposure and undercutting of the dangerous plot going forward on the larger surrounding screen, whereas the cartoon in *Close Encounters* accidentally and uncannily leads Roy back to his vision at a level of finer approximation.

At the opposite pole from cartoon fantasy is the mundane triviality of the TV soap opera that plays behind Roy's telephone blow-up with his wife, followed by the otherworldly clue offered by the news broadcast. On the evidence of that long improbable shot of Devil's Tower in their coverage of the nerve gas scare, the entire network news crew would seem to have caught the intergalactic bug that infects the film's crazed visionaries, colluding in a communication to them of their long-sought destination. Briefly before us on the TV screen a moment earlier was the soap opera's visual cliché of an hourglass, to symbolise 'The Days of Our Lives' running through our fingers in the inexorable stream of time. This stock icon is quickly brought up against that fresh, redemptive symbol visually dwelled upon in the newscast's documentary footage, the mountainous blunt arrow towards infinity formed by the Devil's Tower. And so climaxes the pattern of films-within-the-film in *Close Encounters*, which develops not so much as a blanket incrimination of media trivia as a discrimination between those video fantasies that toy with and expand our imaginations, like cartoons and historical epics, and that antithetical realism of commercialised TV which either replicates or merchandises all that is ordinary in our lives.

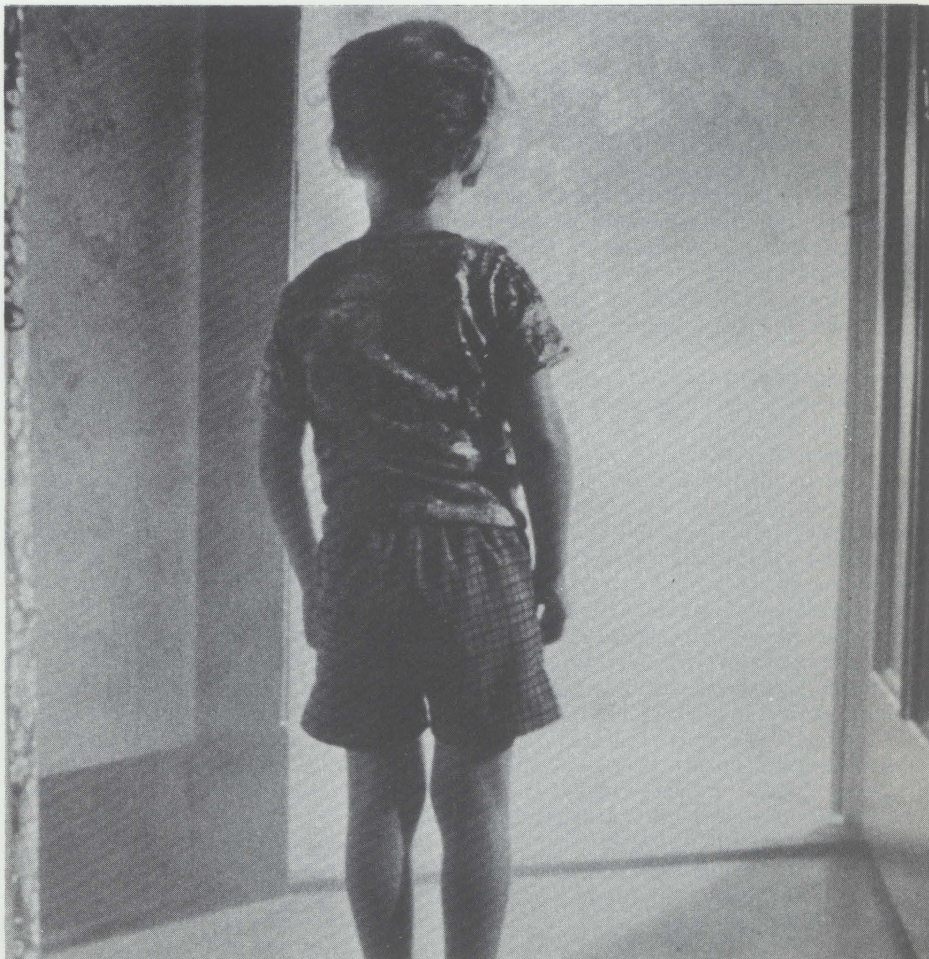


And so Spielberg, the director whom *Time* reported spending leisure hours in his trailer on the set alternately screening *2001* and his favourite cartoons, having tested his plot against the inserted variables of media narrative, animation and documentary, speeds that plot towards the high cinematic self-consciousness of its conclusion, with its fictional blend of documentary precision and subtle animation, as well as its incessant filming-within-the-filming. Rows of still cameras are triggered by remote control to snap pictures of the alien hoverings and landings, along with a phalanx of movie cameras whirring away. Despite the military's efforts to prevent their being present at the site, Roy is finally yanked to safety by Jillian in a gesture conspicuously derived from the climactic Mount Rushmore sequence in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. This guarantee of fictional or cinematic safety, by which their chance for the imminent vision is at last secured, stands as no idle *hommage*. Hitchcock and Disney and their peers do save us by paving our mind's way to the capacity for wonder. Thanks to a stroke of luck and heroic exertion which a film like *North by Northwest* might have helped them to believe possible, Roy and Jillian can now take their

balcony seats at an immense light show whose maestro, barely camouflaged as a character, is a French director who is also the author of a famous book on Hitchcock, and whose invisible baton will harmonise the coming celestial concert.

The cinema's scientific fiction-spinning is by definition a blend of light and synchronised sound, rendered at the emotional zenith of *Close Encounters* as a cosmic chiming between computer-operated synthesiser and the luminous goings-on before it, earthly sounds simultaneously coded as colours on a giant pulsing screen which in turn faces a screenlike blank sky gradually painted with strokes and bursts of spectacular light and spread out above a landing pad that is also an amphitheatre. Giddily performed to the rapt attention and quasi-theatrical applause of the assembled audience on the landing strip, all this, *Time* magazine was right, is a cinematic spectacle-within-a-spectacle, a self-celebrating cinematic illusion leagued with the vitalising 'animation' of related genres—cartoons, fantasies, Hitchcockian adventure tales, historical or Biblical pageants, Westerns, and the rest—as they bind us more vividly to our dreams. As such a spectacle, it is a pre-eminently photographable event. Roy Neary had earlier tried to capture an encounter on film with an everyday snapshot camera, and at the end, while all the high-speed, automatic cameras are churning on their tripods beneath her, and of course while she is herself being photographed as a human register of wonder by Spielberg, Jillian snaps madly away with her Kodak, taking, as the novel's last sentence has it, 'the last of the most important pictures in the history of the world'.

Barry (Cary Guffey) en route to a close encounter



Close Encounters of the Third Kind is a film precisely about film's power to envision *ex nihilo* what it cannot express or otherwise convey. This is the subject of its subtext, ramified with the outlines of film history and media advance cleverly in mind. On any cinema screen, and all the more so with the increased sophistication of film technology, two-dimensional space opens upon an illusory flickering depth into which our eyes lead our imaginations. Yet there is often an imaginatively self-evident though invisible fourth dimension to contend with, a reflexive mirror intersecting the three other planes of film space, reflecting back on itself and back in time, toward the cinema's mechanical springs in technical invention and its psychological fountainhead in dreams projected as moving shapes.

What Spielberg has sensed at once so largely and so delicately is that science fiction, by the direct exploitation of this twin cinematic genesis in mechanics and fantasy, by its immediate confession of the dual modality implied by the phrase 'dream machine', is disposed more than other genres to manifest this fourth dimension of cinematic self-awareness. Implicitly a vindication of fantasy film, of cartoons, of all filmic devices and formulas by which reality gets idealised and remodelled, and by taking all along, and especially at the end, the measure of itself as film feat, Spielberg's new popular monument explores its generic identity both grandly and gaily. It negotiates as so many important films do, by a self-mirroring in the admitted dimension of their own fictionality, a clarifying confrontation with its own essential nature: that closest encounter of the fourth kind. ■

Lothar Wolff, who worked extensively with Paul Fejos during the 1930s, tells an anecdote that typifies the character of a man who moved restlessly from career to career, and from country to country—covering in twenty-five years five continents, almost a dozen countries, and the professions of doctor, film director and anthropologist. In the course of a boat trip with some of his collaborators, Fejos took out a gold watch, a family heirloom, to check the time. One of the actresses in the company asked to look at it more closely. 'Take it,' he said, 'it's yours.' 'Oh, no,' replied the embarrassed actress, 'I couldn't possibly.' 'Take it,' Fejos insisted, and when the actress still refused, he tossed the watch over the side of the boat into the river. A very Hungarian gesture, but also the act of a man who refused to let himself be tied down by possessions or by anything that seemed to restrict his freedom of choice or movement. When the cinema could no longer offer him the creative freedom he demanded, there was no question of eking out a career as a studio director in the hope that every five years he would be allowed to make the kind of film that mattered to him—instead, film-making too went over the side of the boat, and a new phase of life began.

There can be few film-makers who produced significant work when based in centres as politically and culturally diverse as Hollywood, the proto-Fascist Budapest of the early 30s, Paris, Vienna, Copenhagen and Thailand; just as there can be few who, after working on a five million dollar budget in Hollywood, could be happy ten years later wandering round the hinterlands of Madagascar and Peru, with a minimal crew, photographing and recording customs, ceremonies and vanishing modes of life. Yet definite patterns emerge and recur that tie together work produced in such widely differing circumstances, and which even span the divergent genres of fiction film and documentary (much further apart in the 30s than they are today).

The difficulties of 'placing' Fejos, who rarely worked for more than two or three years within any one defined film tradition, together with the relative inaccessibility of much of his best work, have no doubt contributed to the fact that he is known today almost solely for *Lonesome* (1928), a work which is finally taking its merited place as one of the peaks of American silent cinema. Yet if, for example, a print of his first American film, *The Last Moment* (1927, now classed as 'lost'), could be recovered,* he would almost certainly be seen, in the light of that film, *Lonesome* and *Broadway* (1929), as one of the major technical innovators of the period, worthy to rank with Murnau, Lubitsch and Mamoulian. And his later, admittedly patchy, work after he left Hollywood—*Marie* (Hungary, 1932), *Sonnenstrahl* (Austria, 1933) and *A Handful of Rice* (Thailand, 1938)—develops, in widely varying settings, his favourite theme of the individual or the couple struggling against a society that is either indifferent or actively hostile, a theme which is seen at its purest in *Lonesome*.

*A fascinating contemporary description of *The Last Moment* is reprinted in George C. Pratt's *Spellbound in Darkness* (University of Rochester, 1966). If this account is at all accurate, it seems that Fejos anticipated the structure and editing style of the films of Resnais by a good forty years.

Fejos (real name: Pal Fejös) was born in 1893; his earliest work for the cinema, some half-dozen films made in that turbulent Hungary of 1920–21 which also spawned the careers of Michael Curtiz and Alexander Korda, no longer survives. When he emigrated to America in 1923, he was forced to shelve his dreams of continuing his career in Hollywood; it was only by capitalising on the medical training he had received in Budapest that he was able to secure a job, with the Rockefeller Institute. Even when he moved to California in 1926, film work proved impossible to come by until a chance meeting brought him into contact with a wealthy young man eager to blow the magnificent sum of \$5,000 in subsidising a feature film. From this virtually non-existent budget, and with the help of his formidable personal charm, Fejos managed to improvise *The Last Moment*, which took the critics by storm and appeared in several 'ten best' lists for 1928.

Inundated with offers from the major studios, Fejos chose Universal, which offered him the largest freedom of choice in subject, casting and editing, and where he became the protégé in particular of Carl Laemmle Jr. *Lonesome* was developed from a three-page story that Fejos discovered among the mountain of scripts submitted to him. It was originally conceived as a silent film with added music and effects, but shortly before release three scenes with synchronised dialogue were added to turn it into the hybrid form of 'part-talkie' that flourished briefly in the interim between genuine silent films and the full sound movie. In fact, the dialogue scenes, delivered in stilted voices by actors ill at ease with sound, and presented in static camera set-ups totally at variance with the free-wheeling style of the rest of the film, jar on a modern audience. Most prints of the film in circulation, however, are completely silent, yet mysteriously include these scenes—with neither sound nor intertitles to make them

FEJOS

Graham Petrie

Barbara Kent and Glen Tryan in 'Lonesome'



intelligible. These prints also lack the tinting effects that greatly enhance the fairground scenes in particular: as so often with older films, what we normally see today is only a faint echo of what the film-maker originally provided.

It was the simplicity of the story that first appealed to Fejos. Two lonely young people are neighbours in the same apartment building, travel to work on the same subway, work in the same factory, yet meet for the first time, by chance, at a fairground. Separated by a series of accidents before knowing more than each other's first name, they finally discover—again by chance—that they have lived next door to one another all along. Fejos invests this little story with a barrage of sophisticated visual techniques, most notably dissolves, wipes and superimpositions, to create a sense of the bustling, jostling, aggressive world in which his two shy central characters tend to be swamped (an effect enhanced in the sound version by a soundtrack crammed with the harsh noises of the city). The film is full of crowds, packed together in a subway car or a dance hall or elbowing one another aside in the rush for amusement at the fairground. The anonymity of city life is the force that in the first place prevents the characters from meeting, then constantly drives them apart; the mechanical, repetitive nature of their daily existence is also powerfully suggested in the scenes that show Jim endlessly tending a machine, while Mary, a switchboard operator, is assailed by a press of voices on the soundtrack that is matched by a visual pattern in which multiple superimpositions gradually fill the screen with heads mouthing instructions, demands and complaints.

The film follows a clear rhythmic pattern in which scenes of great visual (and aural) density alternate with simpler sequences focusing on the two central figures, either in isolation or together (where the music, too, develops into straightforward melodic patterns). Likewise, a complex structure of repetitions is built up, in which many scenes closely correspond to or subtly contrast with each other, reinforcing the sense of parallel but separate existences. The first third of the film is made up of such scenes, with Jim and Mary alternately shown getting up, having breakfast, travelling to work, working, talking with friends, returning home and wandering aimlessly round their rooms until each hears a passing band and decides to set off for the fair. In none of these scenes is the action absolutely identical, but similarities of camera placement, camera movement, gesture or facial expression suggest both affinities between the couple and the representative nature of their experience: though each performs a different sequence of actions while trying to decide how to spend the holiday afternoon, both improvise fans and cool themselves in the same way. Once the couple actually meet, of course, this structure disappears, but it re-emerges in the final sequences when they are separated again, and meanwhile other parallels are employed: for example, a man tries to pick up Mary in the bus on the way to the fair, and the same man reappears later to make the same offer.

It might be argued that Fejos, in ending the film with the lovers' reunion, renounces the social dimension which he had created so effectively elsewhere, and ignores the fact that they will have to return—albeit together

now—to an unchanged environment. But a disturbing visual element persists in the last shots that suggests a solution more akin to the subdued ending of *Little Dorrit*, in which Dickens' lovers merge almost imperceptibly into a corrupt and indifferent social organism, fiercely attacked in the body of the work but which they, as individuals, are powerless to change. In *Lonesome*, a doll won by Jim at a sideshow and given to Mary is used as a visual motif later in the film to suggest the bond between them. When a fairground accident and a freak storm separate them, Mary returns home carrying the doll which, soaked and battered, begins to disintegrate. In the last shot of the film, the lovers' embrace is observed from an angle that places the face of the broken doll between them and undercuts, to some extent at least, the sense that the couple's meeting has solved all their problems.

A more explicit, and controversial, attempt at social criticism is evident in the two films Fejos made on his return to Hungary in 1931–32. *Lonesome* had been followed by three increasingly frustrating years in which Fejos, though still highly regarded by Universal, found himself assigned to films in which he had little or no interest and where, as in *Broadway*, he had to content himself with displays of technical virtuosity. He returned to Europe in 1931, going first to France, where he made an idiosyncratic version of *Fantômas*, and then back to Hungary. Both the films that he shot there in 1932 roused fierce condemnation for their attacks on the narrow-mindedness and bigotry of, especially, village life, and in 1933 Fejos felt it advisable to move on yet again to Austria.

Marie (also known as *Spring Shower*) is one of Fejos' finest films. Like *Lonesome*, it merges a simple, almost melodramatic story with technical inventiveness and an intricate structure based on parallels and repetitions. Almost the only false touch is the use of elaborate traditional costumes in the Hungarian village scenes which were no longer in everyday use well before the 1930s; the emotional honesty of the film, however, is consistent and powerful. A village girl (Annabella) in service with a bourgeois family is seduced, made pregnant and deserted by the fiancé of the family's eldest daughter. Hounded out of the village, she finds her way to the city and takes a job as a waitress in a bordello, where her baby is eventually born. The madame, the prostitutes and the customers all unite to help her, but the baby (in a scene very reminiscent of *The Kid*) is finally taken away from her to be placed in an orphanage. She returns to her village, where she becomes a drunkard and is again treated as an outcast; an epilogue after her death shows her scrubbing the floors in Heaven and becoming aware that her daughter is in danger of seduction in the same manner as herself. She empties out her bucket of water, causing the 'spring shower' that breaks up the tryst and gives rise to the legend on which the film is based.

Marie reverses the traditional contrasts between corrupt city and unspoiled countryside: the members of the bourgeois family and the 'simple peasants' behave with a mixture of hypocrisy and callousness, while the usual representatives of city vice, the prostitutes and their clients, treat Marie with

kindness. Even the village children, prime candidates to portray innocence in other hands, here blindly reflect the prejudices of their elders, mocking the half-crazy Marie as she walks through the streets and uniting to mob her when the village women drive her away from the well.

The film divides into two main sections, with parallel incidents occurring in each half. After Marie's seduction, for example, there is a shot of chickens and other young animals that both prefigures her own pregnancy and provides a contrast for the moment immediately after her child has been removed from her when she sees a cat and some kittens in the street, screams and rushes away. When she is dismissed from her job as maid, she offers to kiss her mistress' hand; the woman (who has just forced her to display all her possessions to prove that she has not stolen anything) sharply withdraws it and turns her back on her. When she leaves the brothel to return to the village, the madame gives her money and accepts a kiss on the hand as farewell, and the girls embrace her. After her child's birth, she takes it proudly back to the village to baptise it, and is shown gazing trustingly at a statue of the Virgin; towards the end of the film she goes into the church, stares at the Virgin's statue in a clearly hostile manner, stretches out her hands as though to pull it down, faints and dies.

As in *Lonesome*, Fejos also uses objects to represent a particular line of emotion in the film, such as the packet of sweets her seducer offers her, which is seen lying empty on the ground after their encounter and which later turns up in her possessions when she is forced to leave the house; or the tree under which she is seduced, which she kicks and from which she breaks off a branch near the end of the film, and under which her own daughter risks a fate similar to her own. Perhaps the most interesting stylistic element in the film, however, is the subtle use of music to counterpoint much of the action: the family dancing to the mother's piano music at the beginning; the village dance heard during Marie's seduction; the pianola heard as she leaves the brothel after her child's abduction.

The film's most remarkable sequence begins with Marie trying to find a job in the café that forms part of the bordello. The camera circles the room examining the customers, a woman sings, there are close-ups of the owner, the clients, Marie, her identity card; she is then seen washing the floors while a piano tinkles in the background, the camera tracks away, the madame offers her a waitress' uniform, the music speeds up, she dresses, admires herself in the mirror, proudly carries drinks round the room. Shots of the customers as the music continues, Marie starts to feel unwell; the music becomes louder as does the laughter of the customers, she faints, the guests crowd round her, she is carried out and the camera pans back to the anxious men and women. There is now complete silence except for the tinkling of a musical automaton, until one of the prostitutes comes in to announce the child's safe delivery; everyone smiles, and the pianist strikes up a tune in celebration.

The ending, with Marie shown ascending to Heaven to the accompaniment of a celestial choir, and the closing shots of her laughing face against a background of stars, could again be seen as a retreat from the sombre implications of the rest of the film. But these scenes are so obviously presented

tongue in cheek (Marie's reward in Heaven apparently being to scrub floors throughout eternity) that it is perhaps better to see them as an ambiguous and ironic coda to a critique of superstition, bigotry and naive (and unrewarded) religious faith which is an important sub-theme throughout.

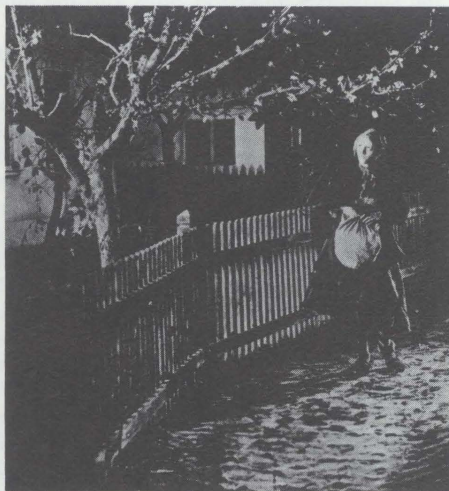
Of the two films Fejos made in Austria, *Sonnenstrahl* is closest to the thematic material that marks his best work—here, a young couple struggle to survive in a Vienna rife with unemployment and exploitation. The first half of the film, shot on city locations, is powerfully downbeat, yet with the same sympathetic observation of human absurdities that marked *Lonesome*. The hero, himself on the point of committing suicide, rescues the heroine as she is about to throw herself from a bridge. They team up to develop some ingenious methods of earning money, but the audience's pleasure in their devices is tempered by an awareness of the dog-eat-dog world lurking in the background. At one point Hans works, in blackface, as a human Aunt Sally at a fairground, while Anna sells balloons. One customer puts a stone inside the soft ball used at the stall, and Hans is injured. The startled Anna lets the balloons go and runs to help him, but by the time he has recovered the job has already been given to someone else and the stall proprietor merely shrugs at their protests: 'Well, that's life.' Later Anna finds a job as a model, sitting in the window of a hairdresser's as her hair is endlessly shampooed, while Hans advertises the business in the streets. They leave this job to take up a better one that turns out to be a swindle; they rush back to the hairdresser's and find, once again, that both have already been replaced.

Halfway through the film these essentially sombre undercurrents begin to give way to something more equivocal. In two long sequences the characters fantasise a much more luxurious existence, first imagining a world cruise honeymoon, then pretending to be millionaires in a large department store. These scenes are effectively handled; but the sequences represent a shift away from the tone of Vidor's *The Crowd* to a mood closer to that of Capra.

Hans finally finds work as a bank messenger, the couple find somewhere to live, and they begin to save towards buying a taxi. But Hans is badly injured in an accident (he is run over by a tram while helping a child bend coins by placing them in the tracks); Anna tries to take over his job but can't work with the required speed and is dismissed. With Hans in hospital, they fall behind on their payments on the taxi; a man comes to repossess it and ignores Anna's pleas. She pursues him into the courtyard, clinging to his legs, and the neighbours come to their windows to find out what is happening. One of them throws some money into the yard to help her, and the others follow suit. The film ends with Hans recovered and giving the local children a ride in the taxi while the neighbours cheer them on. The move from a world of all against all to one of mutual help has something of the fairy-tale quality that marks much of Capra's work in the same period. But it works on the screen in much the same way as *Mr. Deeds and Mr. Smith*, because Fejos creates a vivid and persuasive world within the film itself.



Hollywood, 1927: 'The Last Moment', Fejos' 'lost film', photographed by Leon Shamroy



Budapest, 1932: the village outcast in 'Marie'



Thailand, 1938: the couple set up house in the jungle in 'A Handful of Rice'

A Handful of Rice, made in Thailand in 1938, and ostensibly a documentary, continues the exploration of the theme of the couple (or individual) struggling against an adverse environment. In the intervening five years Fejos had moved on to Denmark, where he made three films, and then decided to strike

out in a new direction by persuading Svensk Filmindustri to subsidise a visit to Madagascar to film material of ethnographic interest. From Madagascar he moved to Indonesia and New Guinea and produced a whole series of short films which, at their best, capture a very real sense of an alien environment, though (in their English versions at least) they are flawed by a somewhat patronising commentary.

A Handful of Rice employs Flaherty's method of imposing a narrative on footage that is on one level authentic and on another manipulated to make a statement about human nature and human potential. Here the narrative structure is essentially that of *Lonesome* or *Sonnenstrahl*: a newly married couple set up house in the jungle and attempt to eke out a living during the year in which their first crop of rice is maturing. A series of misfortunes hits them: a tiger kills their only goat; they trap and kill the tiger and sell its skin in the market, but their pet monkey knocks the basket containing all their money into the fire; finally a drought forces the man to leave home and find work as an elephant driver in a logging camp. The details of their daily life are carefully observed, and the scenes in the logging camp convey a very exact sense of the nature of the work. The man earns enough to buy a buffalo and return home in time to harvest his crop—the 'handful of rice' that is carelessly wasted by the Swedish couple in the prologue to the film. Though the couple themselves are less sharply delineated than in *Sonnenstrahl* or *Lonesome*, the film retains much of the charm of both these works, together with a strong awareness that survival, in any society, is a precarious mixture of luck and often thankless endeavour. A version of the film called *The Jungle of Chang* was released in America by RKO. Significantly, this omits the prologue and so negates Fejos' point that a couple in Sweden can afford to throw away what represents a year's hard struggle by the couple in Thailand.

After 1940, Fejos' interests turned much more towards anthropology for its own sake. He was appointed director of the newly established Wenner-Gren Foundation for anthropological research in New York, and carried out field work in Peru, where he performed some important archaeological excavations and produced two works on the ethnography of the region and the local Indian tribes. In conjunction with this he made a final film, *The Yagua*. This begins as a study of a tribe abandoning its village and setting up a new one further down the river, emphasising the physical preparations and the accompanying rituals, but halfway through switches disappointingly to a lengthy sequence on the Indians' attempts to trap a leopard which is stealing chickens from their new home. From 1941 to his death in 1963, Fejos took no further part in film-making, building instead a distinguished career as a teacher and researcher, and his films gradually slipped out of public consciousness. He himself seemed not to mind this greatly, but the neglect which his finest work has suffered can scarcely be justified any longer.

There will be a short season of the films of Paul Fejos at the National Film Theatre in September.

In this essay I want to develop some of the points raised in the compilation of surrealist writings on cinema which I edited, *The Shadow and Its Shadow* (BFI Publications, 1978); also in the light of the recent 'Dada, Surrealism and the Cinema' season at the National Film Theatre. What such a season does is present us with a body of work and a label to put on it. Many of the extant films made by surrealists were shown, together with films they didn't make but saw as ethically surrealist in spirit, films produced for the most part within the context of mainstream Hollywood cinema. There is a demonstrable continuity between, say, *Un Chien Andalou* and Frank Lloyd's much admired *Berkeley Square*: both are about the surfacing of desire; the formal time/space ruptures which irrationalise the narrative in Buñuel's film have shifted to become the *subject* of Lloyd's metaphysical romance. But this implicit definition of surrealist film is only valuable to a point because it is incomplete.

Artefacts can be sanctified, but what is harder to recuperate is the surrealist attitude. There is a forever lost (and still potential!) surrealist cinema, a montage of those moments, sequences, in any number of forgotten, culturally 'unjustifiable' films (in fact any ribbon of images) which spontaneously strike a chord in the spectator, put him in touch with something perturbing about himself and about reality.

Some relics were on show at the NFT. Viewing a well-defined, if largely unseen, historically situated body of work can easily degenerate into an academic weighing of the pros and cons of this or that film: 'Does it fit in?' The spontaneity and ardour that mark the surrealist attitude are replaced by the morbid curiosity of a non-surrealist audience whose inertia before the film icons projected is constant whatever is being shown ('New Cinema From Neverneverland'; 'The Role of the Continuity Girl'). The civilised conditions of viewing, so disobediently dislocated by the surrealists, become a straitjacket as well. But the surrealists didn't go to the cinema in this passive way. They went, as Aragon wrote in *The Paris Peasant*, in search of that 'particular image capable of annihilating the entire Universe.' The charged relation between the spectator and the spectacle is one of the things I want to discuss here. (The creative imagination of the spectator is not considered in most film theorising. He or she is thought of as a passive, abstract receiver of messages; that is to say, is not thought of at all. This was true of the surrealist film season.)



The relation between spectator and film is a libidinous one. The eye, psychoanalysts say, can correspond to an erotogenic zone, and in a child it does: 'The child is first and foremost a voyeur and tries by all means to obtain the pleasure implicit in looking. Thus he also gratifies his sexual exploratory urge' (Stekel). But civilisation soon contrives to desexualise the scopophilic eye, to replace it with the alienated sensory organ Marx described. In the first draft of *Surrealism and Painting* (1928), André Breton attempts to draw up a balance sheet of the art works that have done justice to what he calls 'the wild eye', the eye that looks out on to the world but also behind itself, so to speak, towards the interior model. Similarly Buñuel criticises the conventional, Cartesian eye in the prologue to *Un Chien Andalou*. The famous sliced eye is returned to 'its savage state' (Breton). It is obliged to look within: from that moment on the film describes the play of unconscious thought

rising to the surface, the perturbations it suffers. This prospecting of mental life as revealed in objective reality informs the way the surrealists looked at films and the films they made.

The substance of all the first wave of surrealist films (1927-30) is the coming to power of desire, sited in the unconscious, the self- and socially imposed repressions which this impulse suffers, and its sublimated expression in a symbolic ritual of compensation; cf. Gaston Modot's flaming fir-tree, plough, archbishop and giraffe tossed from the window in *L'Age d'Or*; Kiki's attack on the starfish, dagger in hand, in Man Ray's *L'Etoile de Mer*; the priest's Oedipal reverie of watery grottoes, sailing ship and glittering gothic castle surrounded by sea in *The Seashell and the Clergyman*. (In Buñuel's latest opus, *That Obscure Object of Desire*, Fernando Rey, pushed to violence against the capricious virgin who has been tormenting him, finds fleeting contentment in watching a seamstress repairing the torn lace of a bloodstained white nightdress that may well not belong to his paramour.)

'An earthly paradise. Islets fresh from the touch of God.' Monte Blue and Raquel Torres in Van Dyke's *'White Shadows of the South Seas'* (1928)



When it came to watching film, the surrealists came equipped with their own mental montage. They treated film as a found object to be reinterpreted. (This is only half of the story; see below.) The 'creative recreation' of an imperfect cinema was practised most passionately during the period 1918-30, more systematically during the second wave of 1951-57. Traces of it are to be

Paul Hammond



Surrealist classic: the priest's Oedipal reverie. Alex Allin in Dulac's *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1927)

POETIC JUSTICE



found in the poems, scenarios and essays they wrote and in the games they played. Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1939) does this on film; so does Goldfayn and Heisler's *Revue Surréaliste* (1951). To release a film's latent content, to re-erotise it, the surrealists deliberately broke the narrative thread; they ignored what the film was trying to say. Once this happened, every shot seemed charged with new significance. Precisely because film is made from one 'bit' of reality tacked on to another, the fluidity of meanings, the revisions and qualifications which meaning undergoes, make it the perfect crucible for this kind of activity. Once the narrative has been ruptured, new meanings come thick and fast as one shot follows another: it is as if the film is being reinvented anew, as if it is writing itself automatically before your eyes. And what finally gives this hotchpotch of reinvented images significance is the chord they strike in the spectator's unconscious. They are functions of his or her desire.



Desire needs defining. For the surrealist it signifies the opening of a road running between internal life (the totality of thought) and the external world. The objective world is seen as a reflection of mind. At the same time mind is conditioned by it. Surrealists believe that as long as external reality is understood as a function of only one element of thought—reason, logic—our knowledge of the world and hence our ability to change it is minimised. To maximise matters we must become aware of the extent to which reality is determined by the totality of thought, the part the unconscious plays in this.

Desire is unconscious thought, predicated

on a (poetic) language and on libidinal energy, rising to the surface of consciousness and from there out into the world. It is evidenced in the latent meanings things have. Surrealists are well aware of the way external reality conditions the unconscious through the 'rational' superego and in the ego. They believe, however, that their collaborative censoring energy is not uniformly applied, that there are stratagems which largely bypass repression, which encourage the ego to desert the superego and go over to the side of the id: automatism, analogy, play, humour, eroticism, irrational knowledge. The freedom implicit in these ploys of desire subverts the orderliness of the external world by forcing it to confront its interiorised, secret meaning. Desire is a way of pointing up an unsuspected, if still largely potential, harmony between man, the objects he has made, and the language he uses to substantiate them. It is a way of helping to break alienated bonds or at least of understanding them more completely. Again it is Aragon, speaking of cinema, who wrote, 'We are too sympathetic to what, in a work or in an individual, is *left to be desired* to be very interested in perfection.'



'Nobody sees the same film,' wrote Gérard Legrand, surrealist philosopher, poet and cinéaste, in 1963. This is partly because of the absolute solitude the spectator feels in a darkened cinema. But it is mostly because the film addresses itself directly and immediately to the unconscious. Since sexuality is the very stuff of unconscious thought, it follows that even the most chaste film acts on us in an erotic way. Legrand had been struck by the way the most sympathetic of friends could argue vehemently about a film. The intensity of feeling, the desire *to be right* in an argument where reason must play second fiddle, he likens to the public revelation of one's most secret sexual preferences. It is *fetishism*, he concludes, that cements us to the film. And fetishistic fixation on a part of the body or an article of dress, to the exclusion of the whole sexual object, has its cinephilic equivalent in the satisfaction gained from the fragment of film, over and above the film as an entity.

The metonymic fragment cut adrift from the wider narrative is the ideal carrier of fetishised meaning. The displacement of psychic energy that gives erotic allure to a chosen object operates here too. When concentrated in the fragment, the energy until then more or less evenly, half-disinterestedly, distributed over the total narrative casts a wholly erotic light on that sequence, makes it stand out in relief, erect so to speak. For me, watching William Wyler's *The Heiress* on television recently was enlivened by the definitely sexual ritual which both the wealthy heiress' stern father (Ralph Richardson) and her conniving suitor (Montgomery Clift) performed when removing the paper bands from their cigars. Olivia de Havilland caught the bug too when she lovingly caressed the starched thumb of the white gloves which Clift had accidentally left on the hall table.

The fragment is always fetishised when abstracted from the whole, though it may well be that it is the latent fetishistic content in a sequence that makes it stand apart in the first place. Since not every isolated image has a

charge, an uncanny quality, it's not the process of isolation that counts; rather it's a quality already present in the fragment. It has been my experience that these fragments usually describe a cryptic ritual involving human, often manual, gesture, as in an episode of *The Perils of Pauline* where the hero, his hands tied behind his back, tries frenziedly to rub through his bonds on some abrasive brickwork before water floods the dungeon. Props are obviously important (and heightened). In this instance there is bathos in the fact that the bricks are a painted flat... In J. Lee Thompson's *Cape Fear* (1961), we see Gregory Peck's hand groping in the milky water of a shallow river for a rock to hit his assailant with. In Woody Van Dyke's *Trader Horn* (1931), a rushing waterfall forms a backdrop to an inverted guitar which gradually appears above a ridge in the foreground. Horn's 'son' is holding the instrument above his head. One hesitates to

'explain' these perturbing sequences, but the presence of the element of water suggests that we might turn to Gaston Bachelard for help. Certainly the ritualised symbolism of examples like these takes us back full circle to Modot, Kiki and Alex Allin (the priest in Dulac's film).



The seeking after that feeling of disorientation you get when reading film 'desirously' led the surrealists to aestheticise the cinematic experience itself. Breaking the narrative thread was easy if you simply drifted into the cinema after the film (whose title you did not know) had begun, and left as soon as you were bored or felt yourself slotting the fragments of plot back into place. Breton and Vaché first practised this in 1916. The perambulatory, chance discovery of the marvellous nooks and crannies of the

metropolis was begun by Baudelaire, resumed by Apollinaire and practised by the surrealists. (Eluard discovered the seminal *Peter Ibbetson* around 1935 in this accidental way, when he slipped into a cinema on the heels of an attractive woman.) But the authors of *Nadja* and *The Paris Peasant* are already nostalgic about the city's dwindling potential for surrealist discovery. Both lament the way the city is changing—they are writing in the late 20s—presumably to accommodate the motor car. The change is now complete, alas. And where 'surrealist' film is concerned, one vital element is missing today—the fleapit cinema.

The fleapit was the ideal setting for surrealist viewing: 'Above all, cinema auditoria must be afflicted with the same decay as the films they show' (Robert Desnos). It provided a rapid turnover of films; the staple diet was precisely the despised, wholly popular, almost anonymous 'trash' which surrealists found revelatory. The lumpen-proletarian ambience of the venue—water dripping through the ceiling, rats running over the feet, dark stains on the screen, madmen wandering about—enhanced any surrealist reading, since communal *disinterest* in the spectacle reigned there. But the fleapit has disappeared, and today the dwindling number of cinemas and films they can show, the greater critical coverage they get, the specific cultural quest that takes you to the cinema now, mean that these particular surrealist strategies have gone by the board. You might think, perhaps, that television is an ideal 'surrealist' medium, since drifting is accomplished by the flicking of a switch. It isn't. The familiarity of the sitting room, the incomplete darkness, the relative size of the image, the rigidly codified, repetitive content, the illusion of choice, preclude the exercise of the imagination and lead, at an aestheticised if mildly ironical level, to the kind of passive ingestion of an endless stream of junk images typical of the Warhol school of mid-60s urban sophisticates.



The prerequisite conditions for film viewing—darkness, isolation in a crowd, a screen lit by moving images—have led surrealist and other thinkers to consider it metaphorically: 'half-sleep' prevails, according to Jacques Brunius; 'conscious hallucination' (Jean Goudal); 'hypnosis', says Barthes. All point to the shift away from the censorious superego towards the spectator's ego and thence his unconscious. A film's ideology is the way it maintains contact with the superego, keeps its head above water. Hence the very conditions of film viewing tend to conflict with the message being communicated on the screen. Roland Barthes arrives at this conclusion in a recent essay, 'En sortant du cinéma' (1975). The narcissistic identification that binds the spectator to the film/mirror/decoy can be disrupted by the 'perverse' fetishisation of the extra-filmic environment, by taking in 'the texture of the sound, the auditorium, the darkness, the obscure mass of other bodies, the spokes of light, the entrance, the exit.' One thinks of Breton and Vaché's stratagem, c. 1916, of treating the cinema as if it were a restaurant, wining and dining in the front stalls, 'talking in ordinary tones, as if around a table' (*Nadja*).

Settings for surrealists: Feuillade's *'Les Vampires'* (1915); Chaplin rushed off his feet in Mack Sennett's *'A Film Johnnie'* (1914)



Since most products of capitalist cinema are reactionary and cretinising, the hypnotic spell which the spectacle weaves must be broken. An ideological reading is not always enough to accomplish this, since it tends to emerge after the event, when the damage has been done. Furthermore such a reading often states the obvious, in a convoluted jargon of its own creation, and leaves a lot unsaid. There is something deeply respectful about it. Rather than gossip behind the cinema's back, the surrealists have tried to give it a black eye. The surrealist dialogue opened with film consists of two monologues delivered at cross purposes, with occasional points of agreement.



If the prospection of latent meaning is an important feature of the surrealist attitude, so is the consumption of manifest content. Of a specific, ethically surrealist kind, of course. Though the films they made grew out of the silent cinema of montage coined by the Russians and the French avant-garde, this did not prevent the surrealists from taking stock of the less dynamic, mass-produced forms of popular cinema. On the contrary, the very 'transparency' of montage here was the thing they admired—as Buñuel asserted when writing about Keaton—because you didn't notice it, it didn't get in the way of the mythopoeic imagery you went to the cinema to absorb. Formal invention *per se* was a secondary matter; its real function was to serve narration. The surrealist film-makers played with time and space. When we read the intertitle 'sixteen years before' in *Un Chien Andalou*, we expect the next shot to have a different content from the one before (different decors, costumes, physiognomies). Not so: Buñuel contradicts the temporal leap he's asserted by maintaining spatial contiguity.

The surrealist idea of film language as an analogue of unconscious thought is as fruitful a conceit as, say, Eisenstein's notion of dialectical montage. However, you could hardly impute such a lofty conception to the prolific and beloved Feuillade. Ellipses are almost unknown to him. In one of the *Fantômas* films, *La Mort qui tue*, we see a character having his fingerprints taken, all ten of them. A static camera that rarely pans (any lengthy transverse movement of a character is broken up into consecutive bits of action tacked on to each other) or tilts (actors step or climb out of shot, the camera 'waits' for them, they reappear) serves the most linear of narratives (the straight lines in Feuillade's decors echo this). Such linearity gives a special force and piquancy to the periodic *coups de théâtre* which are the focal points of Feuillade's work.

A mood of pessimism about cinema gradually overtook the surrealists in the 20s. (Some of them were working in it and saw it from the inside.) The excitement engendered by the Hollywood movies of Chaplin, Pearl White, Douglas Fairbanks which flooded Europe towards the end of the war gradually waned. For someone like Robert Desnos, writing in 1927, this new pessimism was due to the intervention of 'corporate or technical interests', to the petrification of cinematic codes and the consolidation of big business (especially noticeable in the German cinema, Desnos argued). The arrival of sound soon



Surrealist homage to Musidora: Kissa Kouprine in Hugnet and d'Ursel's *La Perle* (1929)

after prompted further gloomy prediction.

Certainly things had changed dramatically in a few years, surrealist attitudes as much as anything. The cinema that had originally thrilled Breton, Soupault, Aragon and friends in 1918 was then very much in the melting pot. Mack Sennett's *A Film Johnnie* (1914) demonstrates this well. It's set in a studio where a film is being made. Sennett plays the director. We see camera set-ups, rudimentary sets, etc. Charlie Chaplin contrives to get in everybody's way, of course, but where the film is interesting is in its allusion to the spontaneous (a surrealist might say 'automatic') way films were being made at that time. We cut from the mayhem in the studio to an employee in the street who telephones Sennett with news of a fire: 'Just what we need to finish the picture!' Straightaway the cast and crew drive to the burning location and complete the now revised film. The violent libidinous character Chaplin plays stands in marked contrast to the dreary, inadequate waif he has become by 1925 and *The Gold Rush*. The one disturbing image in that film is of Chaplin disembowelling a feather pillow after a visit from the girl he loves. The onanistic symbolism was clarified by Modot in *L'Age d'Or*.

With the hardening of political attitudes after Breton, Aragon, Péret, Eluard and Unik had joined the French Communist Party in 1927, a more reflective, less delirious, attitude towards cinema developed: to what extent did the content of a given film support the surrealist revolution? Cretinising as it usually was, Hollywood cinema was still capable of producing the occasional 'surrealist' film, like Woody Van Dyke's *White Shadows of the South Seas* (1928). The film's Rousseauism, motif of *l'amour fou* and unremitting pessimism about Western civilisation and its god coincided with the surrealist position.

Necessity dictated this turning towards mainstream cinema to express a 'surrealist' viewpoint. On the one hand the first wave of surrealist films, beginning with *The Seashell*

and the *Clergyman* in 1927, taking in Man Ray's *L'Etoile de Mer* (1928), *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), Georges Hugnet's *La Perle* (1929), and peaking with *L'Age d'Or* in 1930, had come and gone. (There was a brief resurgence in 1932 with Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* and the Prévert's *L'Affaire est dans le Sac*.) The realignments in the group after the debacle of 1929 arrested whatever concerted effort there might have been. Then the introduction of sound put the means of production beyond the reach of any independent film-making. Equally crucial was police chief Chiappe's banning of *L'Age d'Or*: after that, where was there to go?

Nevertheless throughout the 30s we find surrealists like Buñuel, Jacques Prévert and Jacques Brunius at work within mainstream cinema, involved in the political events surrounding the Popular Front era of 1936, doing their best not to compromise their beliefs. Brunius' *Violons d'Ingres* is a sow's ear turned into a silk purse. A potboiler of a documentary about hobbies, made to be shown in the French Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair, but Brunius manages to make it into a paean to the surrealist imagination of the crackpot inventor, the Sunday painter, the visionary architect. On the other hand, the hold Hollywood had on the masses could not be ignored. Although there was no way they could capture the means of production themselves, the surrealists thought that perhaps Hollywood could argue their case for them. And the evidence of films like *Seventh Heaven*, *Berkeley Square* and *Peter Ibbetson* suggested this was so.

The clearly surrealist content of *Peter Ibbetson* still staggers today. In *L'Amour Fou* (1937) Breton placed Hathaway's 'prodigious' film alongside *L'Age d'Or* as 'a triumph of surrealist thought'. It addresses the same problems Breton does in his book: the reality of dream, the dialectic uniting the two states. Peter and Mary, childhood sweethearts, are parted after the death of the

boy's mother. Twenty years later, practising as an architect, Peter is employed by the Duchess of Towers. The pair, who do not yet recognise one another, gradually feel a mysterious rapport evidenced in shared dreams. When Peter blurts out his love to Mary's suspicious husband, their childhood relationship is revealed. In the ensuing fight he kills the Duke. Jailed for life, his back broken by a jailer, Peter is given a few hours to live. That night he dreams he is visited by Mary in his cell. Though he can miraculously walk he cannot summon up enough belief to walk through the bars as she has done. Mary promises to prove the power of dream by visiting the prison next day and giving him a ring. Peter lives. Mary brings the ring. The dream is authenticated. As a warden gives him the ring, Peter says: 'It looks like a ring but it isn't. It's the wall of a world. Inside it is desire. Inside she lives. It's a world, with every road, every path, and the eighth sea...' Peter believes: he walks through the bars. And in their nightly dream Peter and Mary are united in a paradisaical landscape.

The interpenetration of mental and material life is asserted from the start. Childhood obsessions and symbolic action are shown to determine adult life (the maquettes Peter builds as an architect are adult toys). For instance, the prison bars which Peter passes through every night are prefigured by the railings he squeezed through as a boy to get into Mary's next door garden. Peter's adult fixations, his longing for Mary's love, hinge on two incidents from childhood which were to predict his crippled mother's death: a quarrel in which he accidentally broke a doll's face; a wagon he could not finish building because he lacked the wheels. In the dream both are reconstituted.

Alas, *Peter Ibbetson's* happy ending devalues the film's whole thrust. Mary dies. Peter is alone in their dream. Her voice comes down from Heaven. He can join her there for eternity. Such Christian contextualising runs through many of the Hollywood *amour fou* films canonised by the surrealists, and seems at odds with their own atheism and anticlericalism. Carnality is sublimated into a

wholly spiritual love in these movies, or so it seems (but compare the erotic underpinning of Peter's obsessions mentioned above). When dealing with metaphysics and love, one ideology which comes conveniently to hand is the banal mythology of Christianity. (We should not forget that between 1934 and 1948 most Hollywood movies were vetted by the Roman Catholic-dominated Production Code.) But beggars can't be choosers... and indeed this very straining after conventionality can have contradictory results, as when in Borzage's *Seventh Heaven* Chico the atheist street-cleaner ultimately finds God 'within himself', but only because he is blinded/castrated: an unwitting (?) indictment of the Christian idea.



The post-war binge of Hollywood film till then unseen in Occupied Europe stimulated the rise of a new film culture, just as it had in 1918. And the availability of 16mm equipment provided a shot in the arm for independent film-making. The production of a clutch of short films, plus the establishment in 1951 of the only surrealist journal devoted solely to cinema, *L'Age du Cinéma*, demonstrates the importance of film for the Paris group. The editorial in the first issue reads: 'Pro cinematic oneirism, contra drab realism, *L'Age du Cinéma* proposes to illuminate every manifestation of the Avant-Garde. Cinema is not a static art and the Avant-Garde of 1951 does not consist, as some seem to think, in the clumsy plagiarising of 20s film-making; far from being a well-tried formula, it is a state of mind. It is reflected more in the personal visions of certain unusual individuals, it is discovered by chance in serials, comedies, musicals, adventure films and productions for kids rather than in the "difficult" masterpieces of those men dubbed geniuses. Richness of inspiration, the prerogative of many low-budget films, seems to us more important than the retrograde *tours de force* of certain aesthetes.'

Le Surréalisme au Cinéma (1953) and

L'Amour-Erotisme et Cinéma (1957), the seminal books written by one of the magazine's editors, Ado Kyrou, grew out of the debates carried on in its pages (by Breton, Péret, Brunius, Benayoun, Goldfayn, Legrand) and those of the early *Positif*. Kyrou's books codify earlier attitudes. In *Le Surréalisme au Cinéma* he gives us a surrealist reading of film history and an extended essay on Buñuel. Some of his attributions look tenuous today, but that's because the books are obsessive polemics intended to overwhelm, not convince opposition. The fulcrum of film history for Kyrou is precisely the kind of popular cinema till then ignored by cinéastes. In the last ten or fifteen years, of course, these areas have been critically domesticated, their innocence has been lost. After 1957 Kyrou turned to film-making, producing on average one short a year until his first feature, *Bloko* (1965). His collaboration on *Positif* tails off after the surrealist issue of May 1962. Revised editions of his books were published in 1963 and 1967.

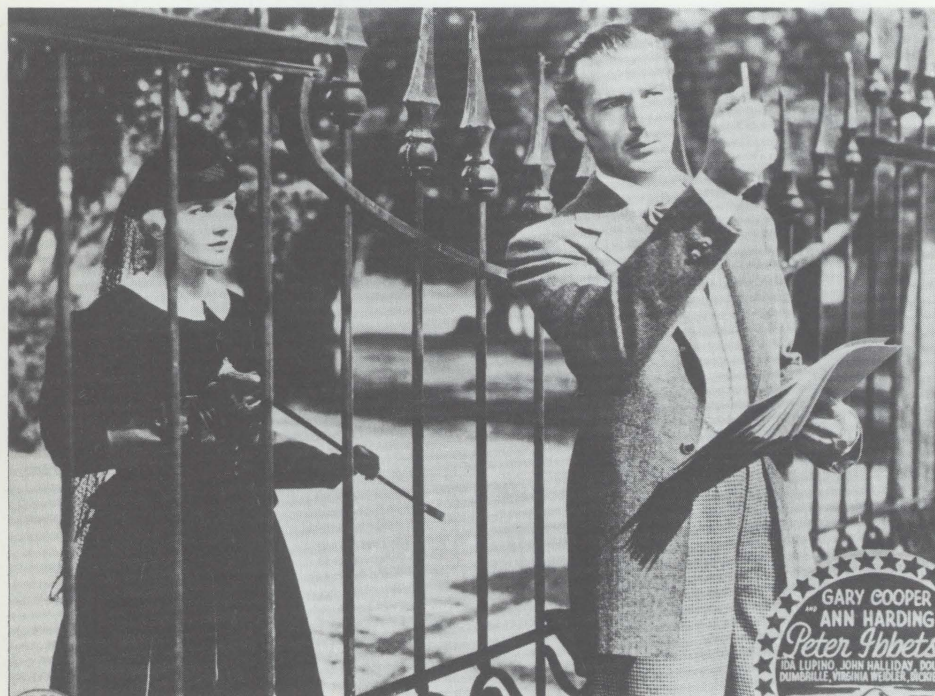


Robert Benayoun and Gérard Legrand still write for *Positif* (although Legrand has always made a sharp distinction between his surrealist and his cinematic writing). Young surrealists like Petr Král (who claims there is much material on cinema in his native Czech by writers like Prokop Voskovec) are writing eloquently in its pages. Benayoun has now made two commercial features. We hear that Marcel Mariën is at work on a new film. Robert Short in England produces a steady flow. There's nothing earth-shattering in this, of course. But then there never was. Buñuel excepted, surrealist cinema is a marginal cinema. It is still burrowing away, keeping out of sight, picking at the mortar. It's a lost cinema, too: many of its products have dropped from view, possibly for ever, from Brunius' work in the 20s and 30s to Borde and Breton's *Pierre Molinier* of 1964. While in exile in New York during the war, Breton mused on the possibility of a society so liberal that it could contain its own contradictions, actually finance opposition, 'gag the denial'. The going underground (occultation) of surrealism after 1945 was in part a means to avoid recuperation by capitalist society. Surrealist lack of interest in the fate of the films they produce stems from this: they do not seek to enter the cultural swim.

The tidal wave of Hollywood film that struck Europe in 1918 and 1945, fertilising new film cultures, has dried to a trickle today. The cinema Kyrou celebrated has ceased to exist. We can no longer look to Hollywood to express surrealist ideas, ideas which are themselves in a state of flux, of redefinition. (The European art cinema of Resnais, Antonioni, Borowczyk, Herzog, Arrabal has affinities with surrealism, but more problematically so.) The very conditions of film viewing have changed for the worse. What then remains of value in the surrealist attitude?

New forms of mental oppression take the place of an etiolated cinema. Surrealism teaches us that the spectacle can and must be subverted *on the spot* by refusing the pact, scrambling the message, bringing the erotic imagination to bear, perverting the sublimated object, recreating it according to our desires. Is this so little? ■

Gates of the Dream: Ann Harding and Gary Cooper in Henry Hathaway's 'Peter Ibbetson' (1935)



MAKING HAZELL

Hazell titles: designer Bernard Allum



Much public comment about television reflects a general notion of television programmes as discrete entities, channelled into the home at the flick of a switch. It is assumed (though not by programme planners) that most people plan their television viewing, deciding in advance what they will watch and not watching what they have not planned to watch. This assumption is enshrined in what passes for television criticism in the press, which tends to isolate single programmes as though they happened in a vacuum. The attitude persists, twenty years since it emerged as a genuinely mass medium, that television—as distinct from particular television programmes—is somehow not quite culturally respectable.

Much critical comment on television is consequently centred on the notion of 'quality'. Programmes which carry an aura of prestige are singled out from the general mass of electronic wallpaper. No matter that television's staple of series, situation comedies and the like may be better written, performed and produced than many of the one-off programmes which oust them from the newspaper columns (though not from the ratings): it is the single play rather than the drama series which will usually get the column inches. A recent example was Dennis Potter's six-part series *Pennies from Heaven*. A Potter single play would nearly always be reviewed; at best the television critics reviewed the first two episodes of the series, and the rest was silence. Series with less cultural cachet (i.e., most popular drama series) fare even worse.

Of course, the television reviewers could claim, with some justice, that they don't have the space to pick up on more than the prestige productions or the first episode of a series; that they can't keep coming back to the regular event at the expense of the special

occasion; and that in any case television producers, and their promoters, expect to be noticed for their efforts to be different. Yet even the longer, more considered accounts of television tend to focus on the areas which most obviously lend themselves to controversy: news and current affairs, the 'effects' of violence, the dramatised documentary. What most people watch, most of the time, is still largely unexplored territory—the cultural wasteland of popular culture.

But does television deserve the treatment it doesn't get? Is it an exercise of any value to chart the landscape as a whole rather than just the special features? It depends on how you look at it. But one thing is certain: anyone born after about 1950 will on average spend eight years of their life watching television. And most of what they will watch will be the featureless mass of programmed images, the low definition faces and places which float vaguely into focus from the corner of the room.

The fundamental difference of television, what distinguishes it from other cultural forms with an established critical tradition, is

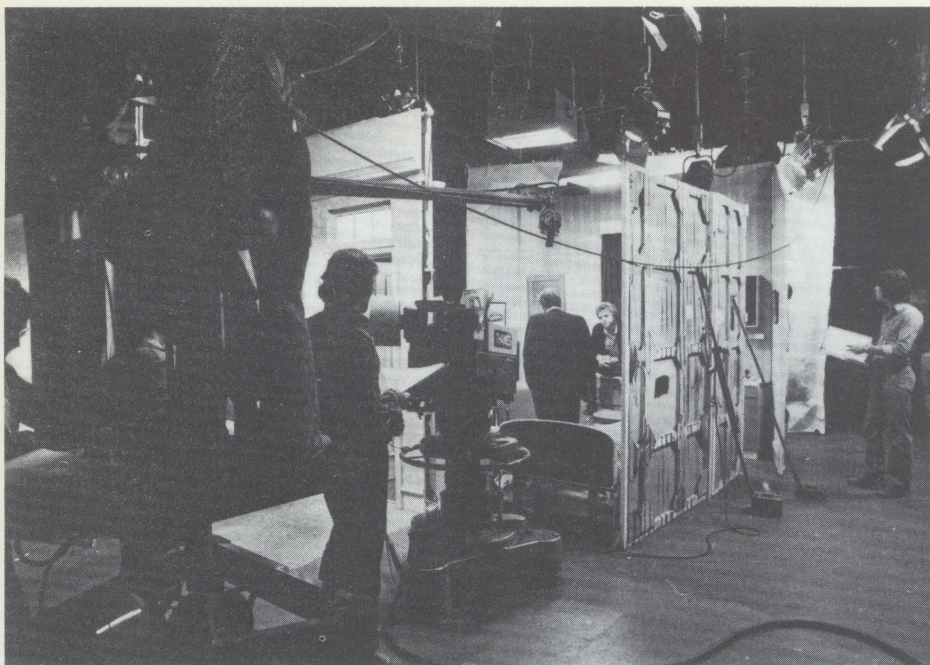
precisely its miscellaneity. No one in his right mind would attend a play and a football match in the same evening (and take in a digest of the world's news between them); with television you can do this without moving from your chair. This difference entails a different response: the developed, habitual vocabulary of response to separate cultural events is eroded by the television experience. You can switch off the set, but it's much more difficult to switch your mind to another channel. Audience researchers have reported that people asked what they watched on television last night have frequently to be reminded what they could have watched. The orchestrated sequence of programmes has washed over their consciousness, as the programme controllers, forever embattled in the ratings war, intended. Perhaps one of the determining characteristics of television is that it extracts a form from the alarming formlessness of the world outside its square of glass.

No wonder, in this sense, that television reviewers isolate the particular item from the general flow. But the effect of this unnatural selection has been the haphazard appropriation of a critical language which, in itself, is inadequate for even a partial comprehension of television. If we are to understand what television is, how it works and why, what is entailed by the concept of programme 'flow' and how this is built in to particular programmes, we need to know much more about the process of production, the disciplines and constraints and institutional codes and practices which determine what goes on the screen. The social, cultural and political power of television is immeasurable; but there is no way it can begin to be measured if most of us know next to nothing about how it works.

This is the assumption behind a recently published book about the making of a television series.* Manuel Alvarado and Edward Buscombe monitored the production of *Hazell*, a Thames Television series about a private detective, which was transmitted earlier this year. The choice of *Hazell* was fortuitous: the series was about to go into production when Thames allowed the authors access in the spring of 1976. But they wanted to write about a 'popular' drama series, mainly because there was no full-length study of a British television drama series. Their purpose was not simply to provide information about how a television drama series is made, though they do this in abundance, but more generally to identify television as a complex system of controls, obligations and practices which together determine the nature of any programme.

The book is presented as a collage of narrative, script extracts, production notes and interviews with writers, production staff, actors and so on. The observations, both of the authors themselves and of those who talked to them, are periodically put into context—though the authors were aware that their perspective was necessarily a partial one. In the first place they were non-participatory observers, a role whose ambiguity has been frequently and amply demonstrated by television itself. Secondly, there were more

* *Hazell: the making of a TV series*, by Manuel Alvarado and Edward Buscombe. British Film Institute/Latimer New Dimensions.



Filming a sequence in the studio

than a hundred people involved in one way or another in the production of *Hazell*, including nine writers and seven directors; not all of them could be talked to, and not all of those who were talked to could be expected to be equally forthcoming. The book is not, and does not pretend to be, an objective account—whatever that might be.

It is not the authors' concern to construct a theoretical model for the study of television. And they don't claim that *Hazell* is typical, either of television drama or of television generally: there were, as there will always be, special factors. Nevertheless, there does emerge from their account a pattern of observations from which it seems reasonable to extrapolate a number of general conclusions about the television production process.

The genesis of *Hazell* was a series of books written by the novelist Gordon Williams (another of whose books became, at several removes, Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs*) and Terry Venables, manager of Crystal Palace football club. The novels are about a private detective—mid-thirties, Cockney, a former policeman. The first of them arrived at Thames Television via a literary agent, and after some delay was bought by the Drama Department as the basis of a series. The decision to buy the book reveals a number of pointers to the institutional and operational pressures which influenced the making of the series. The option on *Hazell* was acquired not simply because of the intrinsic merit of the books, but also because Thames wanted to make a series of this kind at this particular time. Thames, which is the ITV company for the London area on weekdays (a potential local audience of 14 million), had already produced a number of successful networked series of the same basic kind, like *Callan* and *Public Eye*. They had also produced, through their subsidiary Euston Films, a highly successful series about the police, *The Sweeney*, which has spawned two film spin-offs. The format was proven, and approved.

But there were other factors. There had been three series of *The Sweeney*, and they were now being repeated. (Thames is now re-transmitting episodes made in 1975.) Jeremy

Isaacs, programme controller at Thames, was anxious to find a drama series which would attract a large audience and which would preferably run to at least thirty-nine episodes (i.e., at least three separate series). It is not simply a question of audience ratings. What is involved is a network of accommodations, a system of balances which derives from factors external to the immediate concerns of programme-makers. Jeremy Isaacs puts it succinctly: 'So I said [to the Head of the Thames Drama Department] please find something that will help me do my job, which is to pull in an audience that will keep people advertising on Thames and which will therefore fund the programme-making. And this will enable us to do some things we want to do even if we don't think we're going to get an audience for them.' The ratings are obviously important (as they are, for slightly different reasons, for the BBC). But they have to be seen in the context of other institutional pressures.

ITV programme schedules are monitored by the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which is responsible, under the terms of the IBA Act, for ensuring that the companies provide a balance of programmes; and which can also directly intervene on matters of programme content (impartiality, sex and violence, etc.). ITV companies are also status-conscious. A good programme record attracts both favourable critical comment and advertising revenue (which does not necessarily depend, in these days of 'profile' advertising, on mass audiences); and prestige will be important in 1981 when the ITV contracts are due to be newly allocated. Thames spends a lot of money polishing its image.

A company like Thames, with an annual turnover of more than £50 million, is therefore engaged in a permanent balancing act between controlling bodies, audiences and advertisers. In the case of the Drama Department, adventurous series like *Plays for Britain* (contemporary drama) or *Bill Brand* (about parliamentary politics) must be balanced by popular series like *Hazell*. To this extent *Hazell* was fashioned to fill a slot, represented in scheduling terms by the prime viewing time of 9 o'clock on Monday

(traditionally a stay-home night), when the main BBC channel is transmitting a feature film. It was hoped to get a rating of 40—that is, 40 per cent of the potential audience for an ITV programme. Its actual average rating turned out to be somewhat lower than this, though in some weeks it made the top twenty list, with a national audience of around 15 or 16 million.

A lot was riding on *Hazell*, and much of it filtered down to the way the programmes were actually made. The series was budgeted at £800,000 (less than the cost of the average feature film); thirteen fifty-minute episodes were planned, but in the event an industrial dispute and rescheduling of studio time cut this back to ten. Costs were standardised across the series, a normal practice which has a number of effects, principally to ensure homogeneity in style and format. It is of course in the nature of a television series that one episode will look much like another: audiences conditioned to a format, particularly one as tried and tested as the crime/police/private eye series, will bring to it certain expectations. Television, even more than the film industry, has a built-in tendency towards repetition. The effect of this, as the authors demonstrate, is that decisions about different areas of production (what studio to use, what kind of script to commission) are mutually reinforcing.

The most readily identifiable area in which *Hazell* was affected by such decisions was the question of whether it was to be made on film or videotape or a combination of both. This is not, as is sometimes assumed, simply an aesthetic consideration. For one thing, Thames have capital tied up in expensive studio equipment, and both management and unions are anxious that the studios should be fully employed. On the other hand, 'As soon as you do it on film you provide a whole new pace and zip' (Jeremy Isaacs), a view echoed by one of the series directors, Alistair Reed, who detects a feeling of caution about videotape ('I'd like to go for rather rotten pictures and messy degraded images... But it doesn't please the technicians').

In the event, *Hazell* had about ten to fifteen minutes of film in each fifty-minute episode. But the series producer, June Roberts, would have preferred a production wholly on film, partly for greater consistency, partly because her conception of the series was that it should have something of a *film noir* look reflecting the Chandler influence which she saw in the novels (she arranged screenings of *The Big Sleep* and *Double Indemnity* for the first three writers involved in the series). Technology is closing the gap between videotape and film, and there are directors who would choose to work on tape. But there is clearly a lingering preference for film on the grounds that it is easier to control and creatively more flexible, despite the inventiveness of such taped series as *Rock Follies*.

Guidelines have been established, therefore, before a word of script is written. Although the authors do not say so directly, reading between the lines of the book one has the clear impression that some of the subsequent differences of opinion among those involved in *Hazell* about such central questions as style and characterisation, which were never entirely resolved, had their origins in factors beyond the control of those actually making the programmes. This is of

course a familiar institutional problem, but it is seldom identified as such by those who write about television.

One such area of contention was the scripts for the series. Gordon Williams was asked to provide a detailed character sketch of Hazell ('He has mass tastes Facially he is typically East End In general he reacts or counterpunches . . .'). But the stylised, shadowy, Chanderlesque concept of the series favoured by the producer ran counter to the more naturalistic approach supported by other members of the production staff. Again, the traditions of television practice carried over into this series, inhibiting the impulse to do something different. Television favours the naturalistic mode. There is no intrinsic reason why it should; but as one of the *Hazell* writers puts it, 'You get the impression from television that 90 per cent of the crime of this country is committed on British Rail wasteland.' Despite the use of voice-over and a conscious attempt in some episodes to inject a *film noir* flavour (mainly in the lighting and set design), *Hazell* remains firmly within the realist traditions of British television series of its kind, from *Z Cars* through *Callan* to *The Sweeney*. A suggestion that the series should be shot with filters was abandoned at an early stage; script changes were made, but mainly for practical reasons. As one of the *Hazell* script editors says: 'It all too often comes down to carpentry.' And in visual terms, the closest the series came to *film noir* was in its opening titles.

Part of the problem is that the television production system stops people getting together at the start to agree an approach to a series. While *Hazell* was being produced, the Thames Drama Department was also making costume drama, single plays and comedy series, and of course there is much over-

lapping of production staff. The later chapters of the *Hazell* book recount in detail the actual making of the programmes—the role of designers, editors, production assistants and so on—as well as such incidental matters as the need to ensure that the commercials don't clash with the programme content (you can't have a commercial for British Airways following immediately on a fictional air crash). At the end, Thames were sufficiently pleased with *Hazell* to decide to schedule a second series before the first had been transmitted.

'Clearly,' say the authors, 'any television programme is going to be a compromise,' and *Hazell* is perhaps no more or less characteristic than other series of its type. There is ample evidence in the book of the compromises that had to be made between what those working on the series wanted it to be (and between their different notions of it) and what was possible within the institutional structures and the commercial and cultural constraints. These pressures are of course reflected in any area where creative endeavour happens within a commercial, consumer-oriented framework. But in television, and particularly in what is thought of as 'popular' television, the pressures have more and deeper roots.

There is of course, in this kind of study, a risk of drawing general conclusions from particular observations. But to my mind the question of whether such observations can be generally applied to television practice, at least in the fiction area, is only relative. More case studies are needed. And ideally, *Hazell* should be followed by a close textual analysis of the series as transmitted. Such an analysis would gain immeasurably from the groundwork done here. Understanding the system is a necessary preliminary to evaluating its products. ■

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enterprise, police interference, political considerations, scandals and bankruptcies are all interspersed with the practical achievements and theoretical contributions to the theatre of Piscator's work.

9. Conclusion

We should emphasise that Independent Cinema is no more a monolith than the dominant cinema to which it is counterposed. The case we present is itself part of an internal debate, an argument against that strand of independent cinema which is typified by its adoption of conservative romanticism and the naturalistic forms appropriate to it. This kind of cinema (*Akenfield*, etc.) is much more accessible to television viewing, and is typically dependent on certain simple oppositions—for the rural and against the urban, for the human individual and against the machine, and for human values as opposed to the money values which, in turn, are seen to 'devalue' society. These oppositions have their roots in a British tradition of liberal anti-capitalism which has long been the accepted artistic focus for opposition.

What we argue for, in contrast, is in Piscator's words 'the breakthrough of a new epoch' which demands a new realism: an 'epic' realism to replace the domestic realism of the 1960s, and to break down the artificial barriers separating 'fiction' from 'documentary'.

As part of an argument for Independent Cinema, we feel it important to stress that the present state of funding effectively limits the growth of this vital area of British film culture. In the proposals so far put forward, in the Terry and Wilson reports, for the reorganisation of the British film industry for the next decade, no recognition is made of the unprecedented development of Independent Cinema over the last ten years—much less concrete proposals for its encouragement or even survival. The current priorities of the British film industry itself are indicated by the amounts of money provided by the industry from the Eady fund to the British Film Institute's Production Board—a mere £30,000 in comparison to the £500,000 given to the Children's Film Foundation, which also receives major concessions from various sectors of the film industry. In France, in contrast, £3 million a year is available to new film-makers as part of a cultural strategy with its sights set beyond short-term profitability.

The demands of independent cinema are not only financial but also cultural, and must be recognised now before state funding is allocated in the direction of the vested interests which have already presided over the decline of the industry for reasons of short-term profitability. There is already a network of independent film-makers throughout Britain, working in regional groups, whose existence and achievements on minuscule budgets cannot be ignored if the reorganisation of the film industry over the next decade is to assure a vital British film culture.* ■

*The total production budget of the Regional Arts Associations is around £60,000 for this year, and the BFI Production Board's production budget is around £150,000.

The detective in his office: Nicholas Ball (*Hazell*) and Barbara Young





'My Homeland'; below, Robert Vas

WITNESS: IN MEMORIAM, ROBERT VAS

Barrie Gavin/Alan Rosenthal

Robert Vas was born in 1931, in Hungary. He grew up under a fascist dictatorship. He spent his early adult years under the burden of Stalinist repression. With the collapse of the 1956 revolution he came to Britain. He directed his first film in 1958. In the next twenty years he made some 34 more films, mainly for BBC Television. He died on 10 April 1978.

So much for the facts. They go some way to explain the recurrent themes of his work, but they cannot by themselves express the importance of Robert Vas as an artist or his impact on those of us who knew him well and who collaborated with him. Obviously the catastrophe of his early death at the age of just 47 has cast a pall of sadness over his friends. But it has had another effect—and a more positive, affirmative one. It has made us confront those qualities in his films which made him one of the major figures in the history of documentary.

First there was the phenomenal skill, the sense of rhythm, the sheer brilliance of film construction. In twelve years or so at the BBC he made films on a huge variety of subjects—his own homeland, the conductor Bruno Walter, the Windmill Theatre, Alexander Korda, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the General Strike, etc, etc. They have in common Robert's particular gift for producing documents, in which every kind of material was put at the service of the subject. He would

take stills, interviews, archive film, quotations from the films of others, poetry, music and weld them into a unity exactly attuned to his theme and to his own attitude to that theme. He invented a kind of subjective, personal documentary which has no parallel. He would himself have said that he hoped to follow in the tradition of Humphrey Jennings. Yet in my opinion he did not simply follow that tradition, but expanded it and developed it into something altogether richer,



more varied and broader in its range of human understanding and compassion.

Human understanding, compassion, concern—the films of Robert Vas are the films of a passionate humanist. To work in television is to work in an industry and it is easy to settle for comfortable, routine solutions to both the problems of creation and the problems of the world. Robert arrived in television with a unique moral fervour about the responsibilities of his craft

and this was not dimmed one iota to the end of his working life. He confronted subjects which others might prefer to avoid or be terrified to touch. The title of his Katyn massacre film is *The Issue Should be Avoided* and too much television follows the letter of that title, rather than the spirit of his films.

Robert never avoided an issue. He speaks in an interview of the need to 'look into the face of history' and during the 70s he brought all his formidable technical skill to bear on issues which needed exposure—the rise of Joseph Stalin, the inheritance of Hiroshima, the reality behind the middle-class myths about the General Strike, the forcible repatriation of Russian émigrés at the end of the war. For him the history of our century was a story of moral choices neglected or evaded. He saw no difference between the moral imperatives of history and the moral imperatives which must weigh upon the documentary film-maker. As Karel Reisz quoted in his television tribute, Robert's aim was to 'inspire thought, to remind and to warn'. The echoes of Auden's definition of the poet's task are obvious.

He leaves behind a legacy of many films. He leaves behind many projects too. He was researching at the time of his death a film on the political abuses of psychiatry. There is an unfinished portrait of Bertolt Brecht, which will be completed this summer and probably shown in the autumn. There is a beautiful script for a film on the National Film Archive and a projected massive adaptation of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.

However, his true legacy is the standards by which he lived and worked—precision of execution, seriousness of purpose, clarity of personal expression and fervour of commitment. The responsibility to keep these things alive now rests not only with those who were close to him during his life but with all who make our television.

BARRIE GAVIN

The following interview with Robert Vas is edited from a chapter in Alan Rosenthal's forthcoming book on political documentary, to be published by the University of California Press

ROBERT VAS: I started by playing about with a projector when I was five. Bits and pieces of film. I had snippets of German newsreels. An old Tarzan film. Bits of a Douglas Fairbanks movie. I had these in my cupboard and I started with my mother's nail varnish remover to join these things. Somehow it all started as a love affair with the stuff itself. Touching it. Winding it. I put on shows. It was an infatuation with putting pieces of film together, and somehow this rather childish feeling remains with me, because I am mad about editing. I conceive and do my films in the cutting room. I put the material together and there is that spark . . . when A and B become more, become C.

I've been thinking about this quite a lot since I came to England, that this act of putting small bits of things together stands for a great many things in my life. My life has been broken like a piece of film, and all my attempts now are an enlarged version of this small act of joining it together. One piece is the past. Another is the present. Another piece is the future. One piece is communism. One the East, the certainty of the dogma. Another is the West, with its schisms and

confusions. What I'm constantly trying to do through these pieces of film is to build a bridge. And I want you, the viewer, to *know* I am trying to build this bridge. That it is inevitable for me to build it. Ultimately, it all comes back to joining bits of film.

I had a very difficult time during the war, under Nazism. I am Jewish, and I was in a ghetto. But even before the war there was this atmosphere of fear, of approaching Nazism, of the first bombing raids: a kind of Kafkaesque feeling of fear and insecurity . . . One can't forget these things—that 90 per cent of Hungarian Jews ended in Auschwitz. And the fact that I am alive and survived made me a professional survivor, a person who has an obligation to speak about it. I cultivate this feeling. I strive for it. I have no choice.

My mother died tragically after the war, and that was about the time I started developing some kind of political consciousness. I had lots of conflicts with my father, who was a rich man, and I had nothing to cling on to. There was, of course, *the system*. This youthful, joyous, communist system to which all my petty bourgeois friends had subscribed; and like them I found myself marching and believing and holding the flag. Then my father escaped from the country and went to Australia, and I was left on my own and had to hold on to something. That something was the Communist youth movement.

However, the fact that I had a father in the West automatically meant that I was an 'enemy of the people' and because of this I had a number of trials and tribulations. At one point I had to go into the army for three years and arranged to become an army projectionist. And then seeing all the Soviet films of the 20s and 30s my old dream came back: 'to put on a show'. I had an unbelievably vast open air cinema, for three thousand soldiers, and I was playing movies for them. One day I was showing *The Young Guard* and I put the volume way up to make a real impact. Then everything blew, and there was no sound. So the political officer comes waving a revolver and says, 'You are sabotaging the showing of the masterwork of Soviet Cinema! Get out of here!' I finished up in an army psychiatric hospital.

You were a trainee script editor at the National Theatre in Hungary and also wrote radio plays. What about your entry into film?

I tried to be around movies but it was impossible. It was a closed shop. So I settled down doing manual work during the day and working as a projectionist in the evening, and that took us right up to the 1956 Revolution. Gradually, with one bitter experience after another, it dawned on many of my generation that this was a shattering regime and there was a devastating abyss between the things we were being told and the things that happened to us. Then, after Stalin's death and after the thaw, the writers tried to put all this into words and from then on no one could stop it. We found ourselves on the streets in the middle of the Revolution. On that day, 23 October 1956, I had a show in the cinema in the morning. I stopped the projector at two o'clock, went out into the streets and never went back. The unbelievable had happened: the Revolution was victorious. We had the incredible experience of a few days of democratic socialism. And then

the Russians came and the tanks. We had nothing to stay for . . .

I came to an England which seemed to be alive and sparkling and looking for something, and there seemed a great affinity between the excitement which I found and the excitement I left behind. Great things were happening in drama, literature, cinema, social movement. I felt like a bird of paradise. Lindsay Anderson talked to me, and Karel Reisz and others. It was just about the time that Free Cinema took wings, and they said 'Why don't you make a film?'

The British Film Institute's Experimental Film Fund was just starting, Anderson and Reisz urged me to try it, and it seemed inevitable that I would make this film about the arrival in England of this 'bird of paradise'. I wrote a short story which served as the synopsis. I needed very little money, I think it was less than £1,000. Walter Lassally offered to be the cameraman just for expenses; I had a Hungarian refugee actor to play the refugee, and it all just came about very quickly. The late Sir Michael Balcon, who was head of the Committee which gave the money, was very helpful in getting the idea passed. What really surprised me was that I suddenly saw how all my life I had been preparing for this. When I sat down at the editing table it was OK . . . it clicked.

At that time you probably could have gone into either features or documentary. What pushed you along the path of documentary?

I was working for a time at the British Film Institute, reading and cataloguing all the world's film magazines, and the great fringe benefit was that I could go to the National Film Theatre every day, for nothing. The second advantage was that I could go down to the basement and look at all the films distributed by the Institute, or borrow them. And at home I went through all the Eisenstein films, all the classic documentaries and all the films of Humphrey Jennings. The Jennings films were a kind of initiation not only to England, but also into the idea of a particular sort of subjective poetic documentary.

As a new citizen, it was essential for me to understand what England was all about; and it was these films that gave me the understanding, mainly through the language Jennings used, through the imagery, through sounds, through the juxtapositions. It made me feel that documentary films, or that kind of documentary film, were the films I would like to make. They would help me to strike new roots. As I had no English experience, I chose subjects in which I was, in a sense, at home. A refugee's first day in London; a Jewish street in London. Then in the first BBC film I did I went back to the Iron Curtain, to the place where I had left my country.

In other words I was trying to work out a language for myself, but using places and experiences I felt at home in. I've brought with me from the other side a 'baggage', a great many things to talk about. I was scarred by two shattering events: the Nazis and 1956. And the baggage, the message, that nobody asked me to speak about, is absolutely central to me: I must talk about it. And I must talk about it to an English audience who never experienced these things directly.

How did you get into the BBC? And what was your reaction to this possibly most British of environments?

I arrived when television was just starting



'Heart of Britain', from Robert Vas' portrait of Jennings

to expand and there was terrific excitement. There were personalities. There were impresarios. There were a lot of possibilities for personal expression. The BBC then was much smaller and more intimate. I had already made one film, I had something to show, and there were people to whom one could show it, people working on *Monitor*, the arts programme, and so on. They said, 'We'll give you a hundred rolls of film (that's ten thousand feet) and a mute Bolex. Now go back to the Austro-Hungarian border, shoot your film and we'll see what happens.' That was my first BBC film, in 1963. I remember running out of stock and getting Peter Watkins to send a few rolls after me, so I could actually complete my film.

At that time the BBC needed new people. Today this is much less so. Then you could discuss with top executives for hours where exactly within the frame the title should appear; it was possible to discuss tiny details and major principles. A few years later many of these people of high quality who were responsible for the effervescence and excitement, and who brought in myself and many others, became removed from us to a third or fourth degree and existed only at the end of a long chain of command.

When I came in, there was a need for people making personal statements in visual terms, in 'one-off' films. This kind of thing is now almost a dead species in documentaries. I'm not saying it's impossible to make individual sparks within the framework of a series, but everything is seen now in quite different terms: large productions and large series. In the past, you knew that if your talent is limited and you are able to formulate only a small segment of the truth, it didn't matter that much. Because what you *didn't* say, other film-makers would say. It was almost like being in the front line. There was discussion, action. There was even a television magazine, *Contrast*, which is so badly needed now. Television was the only showcase for this kind of film, and gradually one was educating the viewer to understand, to read between the lines, to *see*. But that was only in the first few years.

The personal vision is absolutely fundamental to your work. And of your films the one which most comes to mind on this score is the 1976 film *My Homeland*, about the Hungarian Revolution.

The BBC respected that I went through the Hungarian experience, that I had something to say about it and that it was *essential* for me to say it. They knew it might be an expensive way of saying it, but they were willing to give me the chance. I had a completely free hand. I had been talking about the experience for about fifteen years and wanted to use the opportunity to express something wider than just the history of the revolution. And at the BBC they were willing to sit back and see what I came up with.

You obviously had the opportunity of doing just straight reportage or analysis of the events, but in the end you chose a fusion of very emotive poetry, with the events of 1956 gradually being threaded through. Did you come to that fusion easily, or had you first thought of the film differently?

The film was a visual anthology of poetry—like Jennings' *Words for Battle*—and the tone took its key from the forcefulness, the intensity of the poetry. The structure was really suggested by the chronology of the Revolution. What I set out to do was tell the almost factual story of a few glorious and bloody days, expressed through newsreels and photos—and by seven hundred years of Hungarian poetry. To tell the *spiritual* story of the event. To show that this short, violent outburst for freedom was always present during those seven hundred years and that it was the writer and the artist who helped to bring it about.

Outwardly that suggested a straightforward chronological structure. Less easy was the recognition of the fact that the story for me carried such an enormous emotional charge. From the word 'go', the making of the film became a personal search for what my country really meant to me. Its language. Its landscape. Its brutality. Its spirit. Its history. Everything. And I was trying to formulate this for myself and for an English audience, from a distance of space and time. I

was digging into this search by reflecting on this extraordinary event, the revolution, which I can now well see was a turning point in my life—the event by which I am living for the rest of my life.

I haven't been back for twenty-one years, but the distance has helped me see my country in a spiritual sense. In exile I have discovered her literature and poetry, which at home I took so completely for granted. Suddenly they have said great, tremendous things to me. I discovered the country's music. Bartok. Folk art. From a distance I discovered the beauty of a landscape. I cherished and nurtured this special feeling, and after a time I felt that somehow I must try to express it in a film.

Then I felt that the power of that historical event could well be captured through faces. Through motionless faces on still photographs. Through the faces of those who have brought about the event, who've carried it in themselves but in a repressed, frozen way (like a still), frozen, waiting to come to life again, to relive the experience, speak about it. That was really the first visual motive. Who was going to bring those faces alive? The photos were there (and the rostrum camera can do wonders with this sort of material). Pictures suggested lines in poems. Poems suggested shots in the library material. And somehow, without any predetermined construction, half a dozen basic visual parallels and ideas emerged, good enough to serve as a backbone on which to build a body. Or hold up the building, even though, like scaffolding, they may fall away eventually. But they help to formulate the essentials in the early stages.

One of the first ever Hungarian poems, a funeral oration from the 14th century, seemed almost to have been specially written to accompany the shattering photographs of the funeral of 84 victims of a secret police massacre in a small town during the Revolution. In a film library I found some very long held, tremendously evocative, almost musical shots made from a car rolling along the rainy, empty streets of Budapest in October '56. They were out-takes, never used in any newsreel; and they became a kind of visual leitmotif. And through such finds, such recognition, this became in the end a sort of inevitable film. It seems now in that state of mind that *this* image *had* to meet *that* word; and to fit *this* event of the Revolution to *that* folksong . . . all these were somehow parts of the inevitable, painful and exciting search—which is really the subject of the film. To find my country for myself. I only wish my film could have been made in Hungary. It was a Hungarian film. If I could make such a film in Hungary I would go home without a moment's hesitation.

One of my most precious memories of '56 is standing in the huge square in front of the Parliament shouting together with thousands of people in the crowd: 'Switch off the lights! Switch off the lights!' What we meant was the red star on top of the Parliament building. And the regime replied by switching off all the street lights in the square itself. We were standing there in darkness, our anger mounting. Without a moment's hesitation torches started to burn and I saw there were two cameramen from the State newsreel company starting to roll, and people were shouting to them 'This is what you should film! This is what you should have been filming all the time!'

The film was a statement about the importance of the spoken and written word. Solzhenitsyn has put that into words, in his Nobel Prize speech: that it is the *writer* who records and formulates history . . . that once an artistic truth—a line in a poem or in a novel—is actually put down on paper it cannot be undone. And it can work miracles. That is why in my film I have a close-up of all those hands reaching for the falling leaflets, scraps of paper. They are reaching for the Word. For the Writing on the Wall.

One of the things that bothers me most is how in the West the artist is such a con man, such an entertainer. I find it unbelievable that such people as, say, John Osborne and others, people who formulated the credo, the ideas of a generation in the 50s—how *dare* they not live by the ethics, the morality of their own words, for the rest of their lives. I know that this is impossible and perhaps too romantic. But in my film I mentioned that the average life-span of a Hungarian poet was about thirty years. These people actually wrote poems in the last seconds of their lives before they were shot or committed suicide, because they wanted people to know what befell them and their nation. And to come to a place where there is real freedom of expression and to see that the spoken and written word and the picture on the screen means so little and does so little . . . It hurts.

One of your films, *Nine Days in '26*, deals with the General Strike in Britain. How did you come to this particular subject?

I didn't set out by saying 'Now I am going to show the English what their history is about.' The reason I like documentaries is because there are so many roots and so many uncharted territories. Take library film, which I like so much to work with. You have what appears to be 'factuality', a record of an outward happening, revealing a fact; but what you should really aim at is to find new meanings, personal interpretations of that fact almost as if the event were taking place inside. I feel that history, library material, outward events ought to be constantly reinterpreted, as in Marcel Ophuls' films. The historical facts, constantly re-evaluated and reinterpreted, should be seen from different viewpoints—a meditative one, a thoughtful one, a personal one, a lyrical one.

Coming to the General Strike, I was disturbed to realise that this particular piece of British social history, with which I felt much affinity, was repeatedly seen from *one* viewpoint only, that of the middle class. A cosy consensus viewpoint which ignores the real price in human suffering and the complexity of ideas and beliefs that went on behind the strike. Instead this middle-class viewpoint dwells on a certain myth, how the nation was strong enough not to be broken, and tells it again and again. I felt that there was need for another, perhaps different, interpretation of the same truth. I set out to find it.

I mentioned that I am doing these things because I want to re-root in England. In one sense I want to achieve this by trying to explain my own experiences to a British audience. And in another sense, as a filmmaker given the privilege and opportunity to communicate, I somehow see it as my duty to get to the point of what is happening in this country today. I believe in continuity in history. So I tried to use the historical parallel

to show the various social and political forces that were present at the time and their equivalent now. While I was making the film, no one asked me a single question as to how I was going to treat the material. At that time I didn't have a developed viewpoint: I felt what I was after, but the viewpoint was slowly developing through the research. Although I was a foreigner, I got a totally free hand to treat this very controversial segment of British history. Perhaps it was taken for granted that whoever touched this subject would treat it the same way it has always been treated. No one asked me any kind of question. That was in a way horrifying and it was also marvellous.

As it happened, the projected showing of the film coincided with a threatened miners' strike in Britain. The BBC decided to delay the screening for three months, which made the film lose its very immediate relevance.

I was talking about the role of the artist. About the artist as catalyst, how he can bring about events. I didn't want to become famous or sensational or be in the centre of events. I just felt that, unknown almost to myself, and together with my colleague, Tom Scott-Robson, we achieved something that was relevant and responsible and for which we cared. And we felt that if you show the film at that particular moment to the people for whom it was intended, that could be a starting point for a sane, helpful, constructive discussion about the State of the Nation. I do not think that any broadcaster or communicator can hope for more than to be

of help in any given difficult historical situation.

I wouldn't have minded if everybody had dissected the film and said it was absolute rubbish and factually untrue. At least I would have had my voice heard. The fact that this didn't come about at the time when it was most needed and when it could have been of some help hurt me tremendously, because I felt that my word was not valid. It was a possibility to use my capacities in a useful way in my chosen country, and it bothered me enormously that it didn't come about. I felt if you have freedom you must be able to have the courage to look into the face of history. I haven't set myself up as passing judgment. I just wanted, as a communicator, to *communicate*, to be relevant. Instead the film was shown a long time after the strike had ended, and late in the evening. I was deeply upset.

But having said that, I must reiterate that the film was *made*, and I had complete freedom in doing it. And that, ultimately, it was *shown*. But if they *had* allowed it to be *made*, why weren't they proud of it? Why didn't they uphold it? And when in 1976 there was the 50th anniversary of the event, why didn't they take it off the shelf and say to the viewer: 'Look, this is what we have and we're showing it even if we don't quite agree with it. But it may well be a valid view of history, and you should see it because it might interest you.'

Interview © Alan Rosenthal, 1978.

A library shot of the General Strike, from 'Nine Days in '26'



Film Reviews

The Serpent's Egg

Ingmar Bergman first set down the idea for *The Serpent's Egg* (Enterprise) in 1965, but 'it was hard for me to find the right key so it slipped through my fingers.' If the film had gone ahead, it would have followed the sullen confrontations of *The Silence* and the vicious slapstick of *Now About These Women*. Instead, its place was taken by *Persona*, with which Bergman finally crashed the reality barrier and, gazing in disbelief at the Vietnam newsreels, began to explore the probability that our lives are spent mostly inside the anguish of our own heads. Eleven years later, hounded out of Sweden by tax authorities, he was able to seize on the story of *Serpent's Egg* as the exact expression of a new fury: 'I realised that anyone in this country, at any time and in any way, can be attacked and vilified by a particular kind of bureaucracy which grows like a fast-spreading cancer.'

It makes sense that his film takes up the theme by showing a society in wild confusion and dread, where lives are shattered by the arbitrary malice of unknown controllers. The setting is Berlin in 1923, where post-Versailles apathy and xenophobia, hyper-inflation and political chaos provided a fertile ground for the seeds of National Socialism. Dropped into the midst of this violent, vulgar decay is Bergman's customary artist (a trapeze acrobat temporarily aground from his high wire), by the customary name of Rosenberg (as in *The Shame*), and with a customary antipathy towards the bureaucratic and the rational. Like the visitors to Timoka in *The Silence*, he finds himself marooned in a country where he doesn't speak the language, where his appetites are expensively gratified at the cost of his self-respect, and where he is ultimately in danger of being destroyed. So far, so Bergman. The undercurrents stemming from the era of *The Silence* and *Persona* can be charted through all Bergman's later work, forming a familiar geography for the voyages of all his 'island' characters. One looks the more keenly for them in *Serpent's Egg* in view of its origins, despite the new international production environment it represented for Bergman. Here he is, under the banner of De Laurentiis, no less. And as it turns out, the links with a Swedish past are the very reasons why the film doesn't function quite as smoothly as it should, why it leaps too readily into a generalised warning from a specific malaise.

The title is unexplained until the film is nearly ended. Preparing to take a cyanide capsule, Bergman's analyst remarks: 'Anyone who makes the slightest effort can see what's waiting there in the future. It's like a serpent's egg: through the thin membranes you can clearly make out the already perfect reptile.' Spoken in pre-Nazi Germany, the assertion seems unarguable, even startlingly perceptive, assuming we have understood it properly (a complex symbol, the serpent); but if Bergman intends there to be a direct parallel with today something more is called for than the intermingling of *Cabaret*, *The Damned* and *Mr. Klein* in order to prove the point. Well, Bergman does provide very much more, and the films of Visconti and Losey, not to mention Syberberg, could be cited as illustrations that he is not alone in his assessment of the snake pit. But he really doesn't prove his point. The metaphor of his warning is entrusted to our old acquaintance from *The Face*, Dr. Vergerus, whose cynicism Bergman has for twenty years encouraged us to resist. It is thanks to Vergerus, we learn, that

corpses in various stages of disarray have been found all over the city; it is his poison that has infected the whole narrative. Like any other mad scientist of the Gothic screen, he then chokes to a worthily venomous end. The film offers few enough antidotes—not even a sunny and sentimental coda in the style of *Cries and Whispers*—but the fate of its 'villain' should logically lift a modest cloud. Not so, Bergman insists, for Hitler is on his way.

'Tomorrow,' says Abel Rosenberg, 'everything's going to disappear. Why waste time on a few murders?' It's precisely the murders, however, together with the other atrocities in *Serpent's Egg*, that are used to spell out the collapse of the present. As the film begins, Abel discovers his brother dead in their room, a gun in his lap, his dark mouth open in a grotesque shriek of pain, the back of his head sprayed across the wall. Camera and corpse stare at each other as Abel wanders about in shock, retreating at last into the black refuge of the corridor. It's an image Bergman doesn't intend us to forget, although other bluntly observed brutalities follow, including a face being battered to pulp, and a decapitation. The gaping suicide haunts the film, both spectator and symptom of the later bloodshed, until its broken features are aped by Abel himself, clutching in futility at the tiles of his cell. Bergman has used horrific images before (notably in *The Shame*, with its casual human breakages), but the violence in *Serpent's Egg* is at a new pitch. Similarly, the glimpsed debaucheries of *The Silence* have been updated to the fashionably excessive level of the 1970s; Abel's visit to a couple of whores and their impotent black client is so deplorable that one can only hope Bergman intended it humorously, particularly as the

sequence begins with an exchange straight out of Marlowe—'Go to hell!'—'Why, where do you think we are?'—ludicrous even by the standards of Bergman's terminal epigrams.

Overcoming the difficulties of vocabulary that affected his other English-language film *The Touch*, Bergman is well served by his international cast. David Carradine, despite a surely anachronistic ear-ring (tenuously justified by his circus background), is uncannily suited for the Max von Sydow mould, Heinz Bennent is a superb reincarnation of Gunnar Björnstrand, Liv Ullmann is tremulously unchanged, and James Whitmore makes a surprise success of his cameo appearance. The period, too, is reconstructed with a stylish sense of atmosphere and design: costumes, settings and music have a seedy authenticity. Bergman spent some time in Germany between the wars and can be expected to get his facts right, not perhaps that he'd regard this as too important. His eye for detail, as usual, is both exact and charmingly vague. An itch of implausibility remains, not least because the seething curve of the street with its rushing traffic closely resembles the view from the hotel in *The Silence* (even the horse reappears, to meet a grisly fate). And the cabaret, with its pathetic innuendoes and cheap costumes, is unavoidably reminiscent of the innumerable tiny theatres in his films through which Bergman has cast so many shadow-plays across his own melancholy.

If this is Germany, it's as seen by a Swedish tourist, for whom the priests are perpetually wrapped in guilt (the tragi-comic scene of joint prayer from *Winter Light* is restaged), sheets can conceal living faces as well as dead, and the hour of the wolf, just before dawn, is still a time for the darkest confidences. Newsreels of human suffering, induced by cold chemical curiosity, have also reappeared, examined by Bergman's usual two-in-one team—the dreamer and the pragmatist—who, like their creator, draw conflicting conclusions about the susceptibility of human nature to redirection. 'In ten years,' says Vergerus, 'those people will create a new society unequalled in world history.' Looking at the grey, placid faces drifting slowly down the screen, rightly resembling the victims of the future rather than its masters, one is disinclined to agree. But Bergman has always, it seems, found himself closer to despair than the rest of us.

PHILIP STRICK

'The Serpent's Egg': David Carradine



Les Enfants du Placard

In an early sequence of Benoît Jacquot's film—his second; its predecessor *L'Assassin Musicien* is unfortunately unknown in Britain—Nicolas (Lou Castel), scrounging a hand-to-mouth existence in Paris, sneaks into a cinema where Fritz Lang's *Moonfleet* is being revived. We see him during the screening of a passage in which a little boy, standing bewildered beneath a felon's corpse on the gallows, is befriended by a small girl who tells him about the smugglers with whom he is to become involved. The extract includes a pregnant exchange of dialogue: 'I'm sorry'—'So am I, but there's nothing to be done about it.' The images evoke the most crucial moment of Nicolas' past life, which will only later be vouchsafed in a flashback, his mother's suicide by hanging at the very time that he and his sister Juliette are—at roughly the age of the *Moonfleet* children—sequestered together in the closet of the title, initiating a relationship of lasting intensity for both.

The allusion to smuggling in Lang's film is prophetic of what Nicolas is soon to discover. Juliette (Brigitte Fossey, cast apparently for the association of her memorable appearance as a child in *Jeux Interdits*), with whom he is about to be reunited after her three-year absence in Africa, is living in comfort thanks to the endeavours of their father (Georges Marchal), who has disowned Nicolas, and her newly acquired husband Berlu (Jean Sorel) in smuggling Africans into France as virtual slave labour. Throughout the cinema sequence, Jacquot keeps Nicolas' head in frame alongside the *Moonfleet* footage, creating the effect of a waking dream (an effect heightened, whether deliberately or not, by showing the extract in black and white, though Lang's movie is in fact in colour); and—since the compressed associations of the images refer both forward and back in his life—setting up the implication that he is caught in a fatalistic continuum.

Certainly he is the subject of an obsession with his sister, though whether their relationship has been more than platonically incestuous is—appropriately in a movie whose drama is kept resolutely beneath the surface—never disclosed. To counterpoint this quality, the establishing sequences—the countdown to the rendezvous which will end the siblings' enforced separation—render Nicolas' existence wholly in terms of material survival. In passages that might, taken by themselves, suggest an undigested assimilation of Bresson, we see him evading payment in a restaurant, retrieving a bus ticket from a rubbish bin, even—in a scene whose humorous potential is entirely suppressed—attempting to offer his watch as payment to a prostitute. The deployment of harsh natural sound underscores the sense of alienation. Significantly, the natural world, at least in the qualified form of the Luxembourg Gardens, makes its first appearance in the movie along with Juliette, as brother and sister are reunited among the trees and fountains. Rapidly, though, the city obtrudes again: Juliette's explanations about her marriage (Berlu is 'nice', nothing more) and the African venture (she prefers not to know too much about it) are retailed in a prolonged reverse tracking shot as they walk along a Paris street. The unbroken camera movement reflects their mutual absorption but also reinforces an undertow of fatalism.

The well-heeled world of the Berlu apartment, where Juliette now takes her brother, is the antithesis of the cheap hotels he inhabits in his solitary life, as well as being an extension of the ambience of their childhood, the flashback to which shortly follows. Juliette, it is possible to infer, is clinging to this comfortable life at the dual cost of suppressing her feelings for Nicolas and accepting a marriage of convenience to Berlu, while Nicolas has rejected it to live with his obsession. One can only infer, since Jacquot, writer as well as director, denies any objective intimation of what has happened to, or between, brother and sister in the years dividing the flashback from the present action. Indeed, everything in *Les Enfants du Placard* (Artificial Eye) proceeds by indirection. At



'Les Enfants du Placard': Lou Castel, Brigitte Fossey

the level of the plot, this is apparent in the talismanic role of the swordstick belonging to their father with which brother and sister inscribe a cross on each other's shoulders during their closet tryst; Nicolas persuades Juliette to procure it for him, though her method of doing so—asking the father direct—seems to risk its spell and evokes the ambivalence of her commitment to Nicolas. Later, Nicolas will use the swordstick to fend off Berlu when the latter gives him an ultimatum to stay away from Juliette, but when Berlu then breaks the stick, Nicolas' fate seems to be sealed.

In visual terms, the affinity between Nicolas and Juliette, and the disaffinity between them and other partners, is indicated through costume and colour. Thus, in the scene in which Berlu first appears, his grey business suit disrupts the harmony between the red and blue casual clothes his wife and her brother wear (indeed, the check shirt which Nicolas sports for much of the film can be seen as another talisman, recalling the shirts both children wear in the closet scene). Again, after Juliette has introduced her friend Laure to Nicolas—as, in effect, her proxy—and an affair of sorts has begun, the jarring clash between Laure's floral dress and the patterned wallpaper of Nicolas' hotel room wordlessly enunciates the unsatisfactoriness of the relationship.

In the only sequence set outside Paris, Juliette, Laure, Nicolas and his acquaintance Julien drive to the country for a picnic. Here the sense of release hinted at in the Luxembourg Gardens scene is briefly allowed full play: an Eden is created. In an elaborate shot, the camera frames the open sky, then slowly tilts down past majestic trees to find a distant couple symmetrically placed beneath them. To initially ironic effect, this couple proves to be Laure and Julien, about to make love and free to do so without stigma. But subsequent dialogue between Nicolas and his sister carries at least the implication that they are about to follow suit.

The feeling of freedom here contrasts sharply with the subsequent sequence. Returning home, Juliette encounters the film's perhaps most sympathetic principal character, Diop, Berlu's black manservant. He tells her of the wretched life his relatives, Berlu's dupes, are living in Paris, of how he misses his wife and children at home. His presence serves as both a moral reminder of the social cost exacted by Berlu's way of life, in which Juliette is implicated, and as a psychological reminder of the way Nicolas lives. More than this, Diop anchors the film back in a social reality that

denies Eden (an effect heightened by default if we recall Berlu's earlier, parodically Eden-like description of life in Africa). But while Diop is the character most at the mercy of everyday existence, the film's most theatrically charged moment is our first sight of him, suddenly erupting from surrounding darkness into the middle of a carefully framed composition. It is a moment that focuses Jacquot's distinctive juggling of the mundane and the hieratic, a juggling act which encompasses both the austere denial of musical accompaniment and the sumptuous colour and stately, Visconti-like *mise en scène*.

Perhaps there is a certain disappointment that Jacquot maintains the suspension to the end rather than let the subterranean friction spark a final conflagration. In retrospect, though, one recognises the rightness of denying an overt resolution to a film which has proceeded through a series of lacunae. Juliette returns to Africa with her husband, though she now openly despises him; Nicolas is left alone, lying comatose on his hotel bed. It is a conclusion which may be anti-climactic but is certainly not anti-dramatic. And it prompts the speculation that the *Moonfleet* image of the hanged body may refer not only back to Nicolas' mother's death but also forward to his own.

TIM PULLEINE

Coming Home

During a rather tense spell of rest and recuperation with his wife in Hong Kong, Captain Bob Hyde (Bruce Dern), the gung-ho marine who a few months earlier marched off confidently to the Vietnam war, angrily answers a question about what the war is like: 'A TV show is what it's like; they sure as hell don't show what it is.' As a reflection of the war, *Coming Home* (United Artists) has also taken its greatest pains to show what it was like, emotionally and spiritually, rather than coming to terms politically with what it was. Not simply because the film is self-consciously a period piece, with pop songs of the late 60s burbling on the soundtrack at nearly every moment, but because the makers have taken such an odd, indirect, almost metaphorical approach to their subject. The film, finally, is less about Vietnam than it is another state of the union message about America—somewhere between the complacent anti-Establishment rhetoric of *One Flew Over the*

Cuckoo's Nest (a hospital ward serves in both films as a diffidently realised metaphor for the nation) and the more abstract, intellectual worrying of *The King of Marvin Gardens*.

On the surface, the film's message is a straightforward pacifist one, not so much anti-Vietnam as anti-war in the classic Hollywood-liberal tradition. Analysis of causes takes second place to deploring the after-effects of war: the physical hardship and problems of social adjustment suffered by the patients in a Californian veterans hospital, where Captain Hyde's wife Sally (Jane Fonda), deciding to make herself useful in the wake of his departure, takes a job as an aide, and is gradually transformed from silent accessory to vociferous critic of the military establishment. The vehicle for this change is her affair with one particularly embittered paraplegic, Luke Martin (Jon Voight), who manages to unlock Sally both politically and sexually. The result of this liberation is a curious mixture of lyrical escapism (Luke and Sally go kite-flying with their friend Vi), lyrical idealism (the highpoint of Luke's protest against the war is the scene where he chains himself to the gates of a marine barracks), and plain reinforcement of the American Dream (Luke's attitude quickly changes once he makes the transition from a mobile bed to a powered wheelchair and is able to get behind the wheel of a new sports car).

Towards the beginning, one of the slyly nudging song lyrics refers to 'a time of innocence, a time of confidence', and although it seems for the moment to be intended satirically—in the officers' bar, Hyde is looking forward to his imminent tour of duty in Vietnam—it also hints at the positive mood to which the film is trying to work its way back. At the early, sparring, stage of his relationship with Sally, Luke refers mockingly to her all-American pedigree, from college cheerleader to crisply permed soldier's wife; but when Sally takes up cheerleading again, at the football match staged by the hospital inmates, the activity has become somehow purified and sanctified. (Producer Jerome Hellman has referred to the 'strong elements of faith and reaffirmation' in the project.) What keeps the film at these times from closing in smugly on itself is its makers' evident determination to encompass a broad cross-section of changes that have taken place since the war—the significance of Vietnam is that it served as some kind of breach, and *Coming Home* gives the feeling that it has set itself the epic task of putting together all the pieces of post-war America.

To an extent, this is most interesting at the point where it seems to have been least intentional. The script passed through the hands of several authors, and the film's style—a multi-layered impressionism—is probably as much the result of the makers' shifting cultural perspectives as of any inherent complexity. Originally mapped out in collaboration between Jane Fonda and Nancy Dowd (writer of *Slap Shot*), the script frequently moves out from Vietnam into other areas of the liberated 70s—particularly the women's movement—while at another level it persistently narrows its focus on the military as the main target of its outraged humanism and pacifism (the contribution, perhaps, of Waldo Salt, who became a casualty on those old Hollywood battlefields during the McCarthyite 50s). One of the best and most amusing sequences is that following the first meeting between Sally and Vi Munson (Penelope Milford), after they have seen their menfolk off to war, and working-class Vi invites Sally back to her cramped attic apartment, where the latter insists on seeing the national anthem through on TV while her companion unconcernedly sets about making herself comfortable. Given its cultural and social obstacles, there is something more affecting about the friendship between the two women, which develops as a leitmotif through the film, than there is in the glib treatment of Sally's romantic awakening with Luke. Although this touches all the expected permissive bases—she experiences with him the orgasm she has never had with her husband—it proceeds very much according to type, from their 'meeting cute' in a hospital corridor when she blunders into him on his wheelabout bed.

Director Hal Ashby, at least, is in no doubt about the epic possibilities of the subject, and having moved from such neatly pointed tales as *Harold and Maude* and *The Last Detail* to the expansive pretensions of *Shampoo* and *Bound for Glory*, he was probably just right for a study of the Vietnam generation that makes up in social reach and general atmospheric allusiveness (immeasurably helped by the performances, particularly that of Jane Fonda, who has uncannily reincarnated herself in type and period) for what it lacks in psychological or political detail. Neither he nor his several scriptwriters, for instance, can make much sense of the youngest of the shattered veterans, Vi's brother Billy (Robert Carradine), whose salvation, it is intimated, might be his (undemonstrated) prowess on the guitar, but who gradually disappears into a cloud of drug abuse, his

self-destruction observed by the film with complacent incomprehension. As if to emphasise the scope of his material, Ashby indulges an unprecedented orgy of cross-cutting, such as the opening sequences of the hospitalised veterans discussing the ethics of Vietnam while Captain Hyde keeps himself fighting fit by jogging round the military installations. Inevitably, both the irony and the narrative usefulness of the cutting seem slight beside the portentousness of the device—as if Ashby were making *Intolerance* for our time.

The irony which the film does successfully deliver—the impossibility of absorbing disillusioned champions of the war like Hyde within the forgive-and-forget optimism of the title—serves in a way to make the unfortunate Hyde the true centre of the film. This is emphasised by the curious direction it takes in the second half: having established Sally and Luke as ideologically and emotionally compatible, it has them turn away from themselves to worry about Hyde and the impact of his homecoming. Consequently (if again a little curiously), the central scene becomes the Hong Kong interlude, which crystallises the indirect, metaphorical nature of the film: Vietnam is still off-stage but unavoidably present in this peaceful Western colony, just as the intimations of Hyde's breakdown are the more powerful for being delivered in the strained domestic circumstances of this home away from home. Conjuring an image of America dishonoured abroad and unreconciled at home, this section links with the final scene of Hyde back in California, having suffered the shock of discovering his wife's infidelity and been decorated for his part in the war. On a beach, he strips off his uniform and medals (while Ashby again cross-cuts, to facile speech-making as Luke addresses a high-school audience on the horrors of war) before plunging naked into the surf. Betrayed at home, and convinced that he is no longer wanted 'over there' (the wound that has got him shipped back might have been accidental or self-inflicted), he could be committing suicide or a ritual cleansing in this neutral medium between the two.

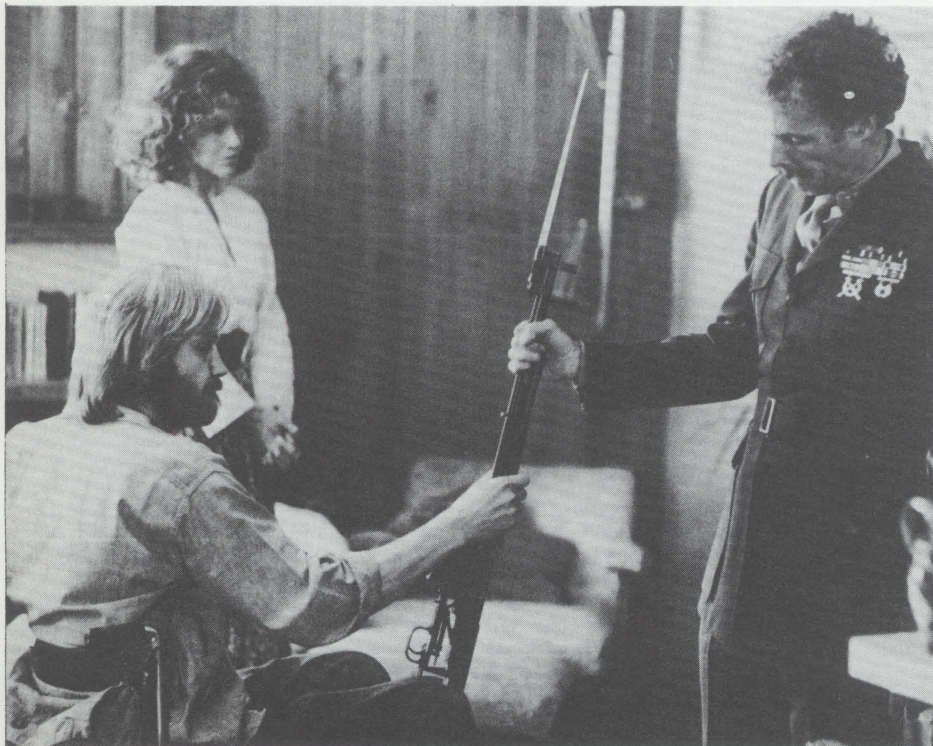
RICHARD COMBS

Opening Night

Opening Night (Miracle) is in many ways the logical extension and distillation of John Cassavetes' treatment of the actor as prime subject and co-creator of his films: a play-within-a-film story that never bothers to make too close a distinction between actress Myrtle Gordon's working out of her problems with a distasteful role on stage and Gena Rowlands' own experimentation with the part of Myrtle. As usual with Cassavetes' films, there is a lack of self-consciousness about the layering of ironies on art imitating life, and vice versa, since the meaning of the film is generated almost entirely by the performances. The fact that, in the early stages, Cassavetes shoots scenes from the rehearsals and try-outs of the play, *The Second Woman*, with the same close-up intensity that he brings to the off-stage sequences is an indication that one 'work' does not reflect on the other but that they freely intermingle. Since film-making is treated not as a form that mediates in life, but as 'life' itself, both the on- and off-stage events become equally raw material, each a possible permutation of the other.

This situation gives a particular charge to the running battle between Myrtle and the play's writer, Sarah Goode (Joan Blondell), over the actress' difficulty with a role which she rejects even while she is being made to identify with it personally: that of an anxious, dissatisfied woman, troubled as she enters middle-age that she has made no sustaining emotional commitments. Other elements in the film—Myrtle's working and professional relationships with director Manny Victor (Ben Gazzara) and fellow actor Maurice Aarons (John Cassavetes)—become the instruments of this battle, and Myrtle's struggle with a too tyrannical creator, who would make the actress over completely in her own image, turns the film

'Coming Home': Jon Voight, Jane Fonda, Bruce Dern



into a succinct dissection of the tribulations of a collaborative art. An early incident, in which Myrtle finds it impossible to complete a scene in rehearsal without collapsing in hysterics or a fainting fit, effectively intertwines the emotional trauma of the character in the play and the actress' fear of humiliation in taking it upon herself.

Unexpectedly, given its concern for such actorish tantrums, *Opening Night* remains probably Cassavetes' coolest film, mainly because the off-stage relationships are never reduced, in the usual, psychologising style, to explanation for what is going on behind the footlights. Myrtle's past affair with Maurice—and putative past involvement with Manny—remain distantly suggested, half-buried elements, factors in the distress she feels over her present unsympathetic part, but not in any way equivalent to it in content. The fact that 'acting' and theatricality have formally been made the subject of the film is a subtle strengthening factor, if not distancing then at least providing a context for the kind of indulgence Cassavetes has always extended to his actors, and which in the past has often just spilled sloppily over the confines of plot and character. The performances of Cassavetes' stock company have never seemed more disciplined or intense, and particularly effective use is made of the relationship between Manny and his wife Dorothy (Zohra Lampert) as light, semi-satirical comment on the more emotional entanglements.

Ultimately, perhaps, the very formlessness which Cassavetes establishes as the first condition for working with his actors leads to a kind of collapse. Since *Opening Night* is not a meditation on another art form but an opportunity for its practitioners to work out their temperamental/creative problems, there is nothing left to contain the haphazard fooling around once the integrity of the play-within-the-film is destroyed altogether—as it is, gradually, by the performers making themselves comfortable with it or, in Myrtle's words, by their dumping it upside down to 'see if we can't find something human in it'. Refusing to be bound by the role she has been given, and turning up on the Broadway opening night so drunk that she is unable to recreate the role as written, Myrtle finally scraps the artificial barrier between herself and the audience. She ventures some confessional monologue and jokey comments on the inadequacy of the theatrical situation, before she and Maurice turn the stage into a forum for some personal improvisations. It is a conclusion which comes across as a simplistic reduction—while incidentally inspiring doubt that a theatre audience would sit still for this impromptu encounter session.

A paradoxical strength, revealed by both this film and *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, is Cassavetes' ability to slide in a conventionally dramatic situation, which anchors but does not confine his subsequent permutations and free associations. The gangland killing which the hero of *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* is forced to carry out serves to identify the narrative, but it never really gains the expected purchase on either the characters or the atmosphere, which dreamily find more idiosyncratic routes out of the film noir situation. In *Opening Night*, everything flows from the powerful opening sequence in which, as Myrtle and her entourage leave a theatre in the pouring rain, one teenage girl bursts through the throng of admirers to circle their car, pressing her face against the streaming glass and mouthing her adulation of the silent star within. In the confusion of traffic as the car pulls away, the girl is knocked down and killed. Though Myrtle's colleagues insist that they shouldn't stop, and later try to erase the incident with pressing invitations to dinner, the girl becomes for Myrtle an ever more substantial figment of her own youthful dreams, and finally a hostile inquisitor, invoking all the years of rapt sacrifice and renunciation of normal life spent in movies and theatres, and demanding now that Myrtle demonstrate in her own life how it was all justified.

Exorcist-like overtones are hard to avoid as Myrtle's relationship with the wraith degenerates from the querulous to the messily violent. But what



The traffic accident in 'Opening Night'

Cassavetes continually keeps in view is both the emotional validity of the hallucination and its function in Myrtle's own psychodrama. It becomes the means by which she expunges her feelings of bad faith towards her past—just as, through her struggle with the elderly playwright, she must overcome her ill-will towards her own future—before she can carry on with any self-respect in her present role.

RICHARD COMBES

Coma

Some years ago, Michael Crichton, a one-time employee of the Salk Institute and the author of several erudite best-selling pulp novels, admitted to a particular admiration for the documentary conviction of Len Deighton's novel *The Ipcress File*. Whether or not Crichton would now endorse the extremes of documentary realism espoused by this school of spy/thriller writing, the fact remains that the subtext of scientific fact (or forecast) which forms the basis of his own novels, *The Andromeda Strain*, *Westworld* and *The Terminal Man*, has proved the most consistent strength of their subsequent movie adaptations.

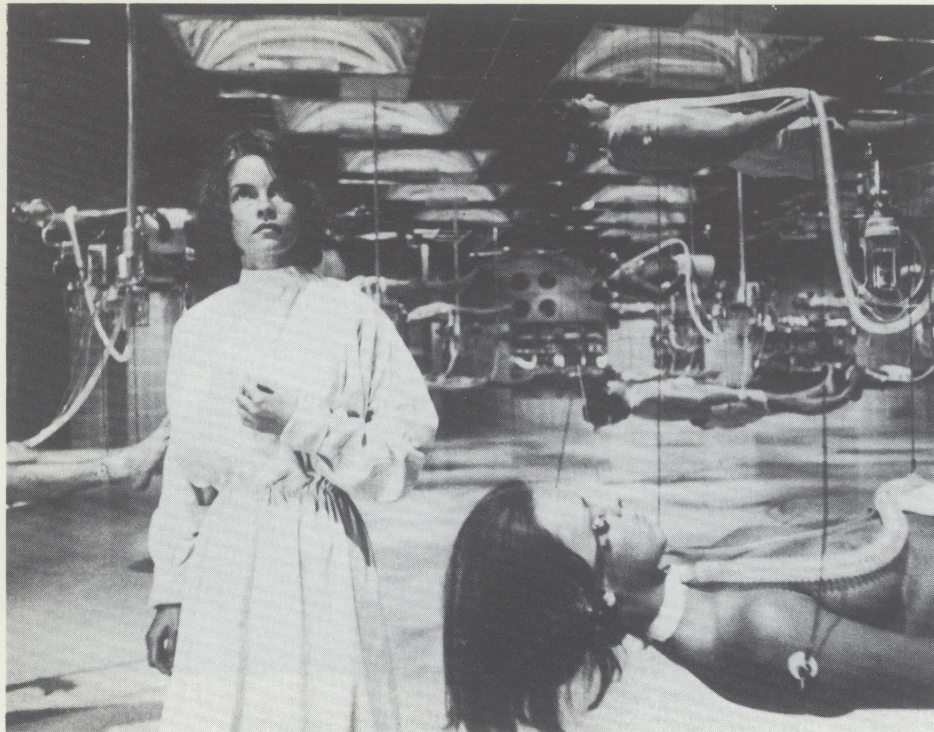
Westworld, which Crichton himself directed, was an awkward apprentice movie, but one which was at least partially salvaged by the ingenuity of its script and the feeling that, despite the caper-ish setting, the notion of cognitive robots was certainly plausible. Crichton is a quick student—his first novels, he claims, were written at the rate of 10,000 words a day to pay for the medical training he subsequently abandoned—and *Coma* (CIC), only the second film he has directed for the cinema, proves that he has learned from the mistakes of *Westworld*. The new film, adapted by Crichton from a novel by Robin Cook, combines dry humour and documentary realism in an imperilled-Pauline yarn, finely calculated not to overstretch audience credulity.

In a Boston hospital an anaesthetist (played by a genuine doctor) gives a breakeck rundown of an anaesthetic console for the benefit of a couple of medical students. The man rattles on with professional conviction: we may not understand—and it is not Crichton's purpose that we should—all that is being explained, but before the narrative gets under way we are made to believe in the fictional truth of this gleaming modern hospital. During the ensuing operation, all is unhurried, practised dexterity. We are lulled into a state of confidence; there is no goriness, and the feeling of discreet normality is underlined. It transpires, of

course, that all is very far from well in this most hallowed sanctuary of American medicine. The patient goes into a coma and dies, supposedly from an adverse reaction to the anaesthetic; and, after the results of the post mortem disappear into the confidential recesses of a computer, the woman's body is taken to the monolithic Jefferson Institute, a government foundation for research into the care of comatose patients.

An exemplary member of the hospital staff, and one who by her diligent seriousness personifies the hospital itself, is our surgeon heroine, Dr. Susan Wheeler. Although she has a lover, Mark Bellows (Michael Douglas), a doctor preoccupied with hospital politics, Susan is the almost exclusive focus of our attention: probing for the reasons for the death of her best friend during the opening operation, she gradually uncovers a conspiracy to murder a random but steady stream of patients. Just as the casting of Yul Brynner as the maverick robot gunslinger in *Westworld* added a quirky sense of class to that picture, so here the casting of Genevieve Bujold, against type, as the austere coiffed surgeon with the feminist wiles and slightly grating Canadian accent, adds an authority which the other name players palpably fail to supply (Douglas is blandness and nothing more, while Richard Widmark, as the hospital doctor and villain of the piece, reminds one—even after his climactic confession—of a benign elder statesman rather than a world-class megalomaniac). The burden of the plot falls on Bujold's shoulders, and the film's success depends on the fact that not only can she run with its absurdities, she can also so assuredly take us with her.

The film is admirably plotted. Its climaxes are carefully spaced, with dashes of cathartic humour, such as when Susan escapes from the man sent to kill her in the hospital by burying him under a pile of polythene-wrapped corpses, strung up like sides of meat in a refrigerator. Its punctuating pauses, such as Susan and Mark's brief idyll in the New England countryside, are never unnecessarily prolonged. And its effects are judiciously restrained—a hall full of comatose patients at the Jefferson Institute, suspended aloft by wires, is used specifically as a divergent ploy, a convincing example for a group of visiting doctors that the institute is caring for the chronically sick rather than acting as a conduit for global deals in human innards. *Coma* skims along with an audacious, good-natured artifice, never really threatening us with the proposition that spare-part surgery could in fact lead to a hospital director, frustrated by the legal constraints on euthanasia, losing his reason and murdering appendectomy cases.



Genevieve Bujold in 'Coma'

Coma is in some ways a pleasingly old-fashioned movie. It reaffirms the virtues of a logical plot, an identifiable milieu, characters shoe-horned into the action. Without the Hitchcockian concern with psychological motivation, it nevertheless has something of Hitchcock's sleight of hand, something of his taste for pleasing symmetry. Aiming to please rather than horrify, it can show a pathologist nonchalantly slicing up a human brain as if it were a ham in such a way that it does not turn our stomachs. Talking about the film's making, Crichton said: 'By the time this picture is finished, I will have more than doubled my previous directing experience. In a way it's like an infant, where each year in his life is an enormous multiple of his previous experience. I have a certain sense of being in my infancy now—and that's exciting.' *Coma* conveys this excitement.

JOHN PYM

An Unmarried Woman

The critical and box-office success of Paul Mazursky's *Harry and Tonto* in America was not reflected on this side of the Atlantic. Nor did *Blume in Love* or *Next Stop, Greenwich Village*, despite praise, add much to their American returns in Europe. Only Mazursky's first feature as writer-director, the funny but compromised *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*, made almost a decade ago, proved a financial success outside America. *An Unmarried Woman* (Fox), his sixth feature, does however seem likely to confirm Mazursky's initial promise as one of America's readily exportable directors of intelligence. It is in many ways his most smoothly achieved film—a study, like almost all his work, of the paradoxes of American middle-class life and one which hasn't the fractured, absurdist tone of some of his earlier projects. Its basis of realism and accessible high seriousness is certainly not unleavened by irony and even wit. But this time Mazursky has homed in on an argument that leaves him little room for nostalgia or slices of semi-autobiographical indulgence and more for a properly minute examination of the subject in hand.

On its side too, at the moment, is the fact that the film's central character is a woman, Erica, the sudden collapse of whose long-lasting marriage renders her unable at first to cope with the radically altered circumstances of her life. As played by Jill Clayburgh, and with considerable virtuosity too, Erica is the sort of victim who ought not to be

defenceless. She is trim-figured, intelligent, not noticeably ravaged by time and distinctly lucky to be both in an interesting job and financially cushioned against disaster. Her errant husband (Michael Murphy) is a Wall Street broker who cries with remorse at what he is doing to her by taking up with a younger woman, and willingly leaves her comfortably ensconced in the sort of East Side apartment that even their precocious teenage daughter cannot complain about. When she asks him to finance an expensive dose of therapy, he objects only to phrases like 'I was your hooker', which make him think that there's some conspiracy between patient and psychiatrist that he shouldn't be paying for. For all this, Erica arrives on the edge of breakdown, capable only of consorting with her gaggle of woman friends who form a kind of contemporary Greek chorus in front of which her trauma is played out. 'Balls, said the Queen,' she reflects tearfully in front of the mirror. 'If I had them, I'd be King.' It's a remark her friends, each of them in a similar state of middle-aged uncertainty, would seem likely to echo.

Fortunately the therapist—'I'd risk it with some new men. I think you could enjoy them'—works wonders. The first new man is the attractive phallocrat (Cliff Gorman) who has been sniffing around without success for some time, and he is followed by an English painter (Alan Bates), who offers Erica summer in Vermont—a considerable inducement after steamy New York—and the probability of a more lasting relationship. Added to that, her husband comes slinking back, summarily dismissed by his younger paramour. Offered the chance of her old life back (jogging in the mornings, sex twice a week) or an exciting new affair that looks like holding together more attractively, she digs in her heels and refuses both. She has become, in short, her own mistress.

Baldly recounted, since what is most important about *An Unmarried Woman* is its wealth of persuasive minor detail, the film might seem unlikely to achieve the paeans of praise it has garnered in some normally more rigorous quarters. Isn't Erica just too favoured by the gods to be entirely flesh and blood? And wouldn't she almost certainly have played her luck for all it was worth in Vermont with her sexy, caring painter? 'I could use a challenge in my work,' she says to him. 'Living with me is work,' he replies, a trifle unwisely under the circumstances. But, more importantly, shouldn't this really have been a story about all those less conveniently endowed women left even more painfully in the lurch around the forty mark?

The answer to each question has to be in the affirmative. Yet the film remains obstinately likeable and, but for its final section, satisfying too. It collects its truths about it with an honesty of purpose and an observational accuracy that are fairly rare in upper middlebrow American cinema.

This is substantially because Mazursky seems to know the terrain, even if only as a spectator, and also because he has always had a very sure touch both as a writer and a director of actors. It is at least arguable that he is essentially a portraitist and capable at his best of being a spectacularly accurate one, shrewd but seldom spiteful. It is not for nothing that George Segal's Blume, Art Carney's Harry and Lenny Baker's Lapinsky are among the best work these performers have vouchsafed to us. Jill Clayburgh's Erica is something exceptional, a performance that is at its best at precisely those points when the tiniest of false notes could collapse an entire sequence. We observe not only what others think of her but what she thinks of herself. Time and again some small detail of facial or vocal expression effectively primes a larger point. Michael Murphy too, in a part that's less than sympathetic, manages to be eminently watchable, and Alan Bates is stylish without resorting to theatricality. But there isn't much doubt that Pat Quinn, Kelly Bishop and Linda Miller as Erica's strained but supportive friends are as much the real fulcrum of the picture as Clayburgh herself. Not many directors could have made this womanly quartet play so sweetly together, or painted them in a clearer light. *An Unmarried Woman* may indeed raise more questions than it is prepared to answer, but it doesn't entirely fiddle while Rome burns in the feminist cause. One gets the feeling, for one thing, that it is a film which contains passages of dialogue almost everyone will recognise as uncomfortably close to home. If it doesn't exactly bite a chunk out of the flesh, it certainly pricks the skin.

DEREK MALCOLM

Pennies From Heaven

Dennis Potter's musical play *Pennies From Heaven* (BBC TV) typically lifts its title from a 30s popular song, as do its six individual parts. Previous Potter works graced with song titles include *Moonlight on the Highway* (1969), *Paper Roses* (1971), *Angels are so Few* (1971), *Follow the Yellow Brick Road* (1972), *Only Make Believe* (1973) and *Double Dare* (1976). Many of these songs are associated with Al Bowlly, a British crooner of the period when popular lyrics implied that dreams were possible—a promise extinguished by the sour 70s. *Moonlight on the Highway* dwells on one man's obsession with Bowlly, and seems to have fostered Potter's predilection. Like Howard Schuman's *Rock Follies*, similarly interspersed with musical numbers and routines, and defiantly anti-naturalistic, *Pennies From Heaven* deals in dreams, their flowering and endurance amid stony realities. The 'Sugar Mountain' of *Rock Follies* is success in 'the show business', which must be measured ultimately in material terms. Although equally grounded in the monstrously mundane, 'the real life', the dreams of *Pennies From Heaven* are less articulate, vaguer, more abstract, and thus more easily amenable to Potter's characteristic, though not glib, transmutation into spiritual yearnings.

Reduced to a story-line, the work has the garish banality of melodrama, mixing Love, Murder, Betrayal, Suicide, Flight, Retribution and perhaps Resurrection (the capitals seem obligatory), or playing on the beguiling but trite simplicity of a fairy-tale. A taste for melodrama marks much of Potter's other work for television, most notably *Brimstone and Treacle* (1975, banned by the BBC), in which the Devil stalks suburbia to the ironic strains of 'That Old Black Magic'. *Pennies From Heaven* is set in 1935 (the year of Potter's birth). Arthur Parker (Bob Hoskins), the archetypal vulgar little man, is an unsuccessful song-sheet salesman who badly wants real life to be like the songs he peddles, filled with eternal blue skies,

and—more earth-bound—to enjoy sex with his prim wife Joan (Gemma Craven) and to run his own record shop.

Arthur comes from a long line of Potter heroes who entertain fantasies. The girl of his own dream is Eileen (Cheryl Campbell), a school-teacher in the Forest of Dean (Potter's old school was reopened for the play). 'You walk around with grit and gravel in your eyes. You can't see what a beautiful world it is we live in,' rhapsodises love-struck Arthur to his fellow commercial travellers. Arthur's words recall those of the strange busker he picks up on his travels, befriends in 'Christian' fashion, and later deserts, whose repertoire on his accordion spans a mere trio of hymn tunes. The Accordion Man (Kenneth Colley), who first mimes the title song 'Pennies From Heaven' to Arthur in a café, is Arthur's *alter ego*, translating his darker desires into reality. Arthur almost strangles Joan, but it is the Accordion Man who brutally murders a blind girl whom Arthur has also encountered on the road and turned into a dream girl. 'It's about this gap between expectation and what we physically are,' said Potter about an earlier play, *Double Dare*, which also deals in erotic fantasies and murder.

Arthur proves a false prince to Eileen, leaving her pregnant. She drifts into prostitution in London, where they meet again and decide to elope, after gleefully smashing the records in the shop Arthur has acquired, though Arthur draws the line at 'Roll Along Prairie Moon', the song he mimed when he first encountered Eileen. Dreams are discarded, as they become flesh. In hiding, the pair live off Eileen's prostitution, then go on the run when they discover that Arthur is wanted for the murder of the blind girl. They are caught after Eileen has shot dead a farmer in whose barn they have spent the night; Arthur is brought to trial, found guilty, and hanged.

'Extraordinary how potent cheap music is,' Potter takes up Noël Coward's words in his highly original use of 30s popular music to embody and comment on the aspirations of his characters. The songs may hold aloft a debased version of the Garden of Eden, but the vision retains a validity. The play's central device is the miming by the characters to the actual recordings of the period, over sixty songs in all. In the first scene, for instance, Arthur's sexual advance to his wife is rejected, and with a minimal lighting change he mimes to Elsie Carlisle's recording of 'The Clouds Will Soon Roll By'. The mismatching of character with vocalist is a common feature. It's all done within the conventions of the musical—once the song is over, the action continues as if nothing had happened. This particular song is later reprised by Joan as she waits for Arthur to return home from the 'prairies' of Gloucestershire. Before the mime, as she sees her reflection in a mirror, she mumbles distractedly 'Mirror, mirror, on the wall'—fairy-tale words which she has used earlier at her dressing table, and which are later spoken ironically by Eileen to an unshaven Arthur when they are on the run. This is but one instance of Potter's deployment in the play of repetition and cross-reference—key elements of any fairy story.

The first part of *Pennies From Heaven* might be seen—as it probably was seen by its television audience—as an episode establishing character and plot, albeit deploying the novel miming device. The intensity associated with Potter's single plays might appear to be dissipated by the musical interludes, the episode easily absorbed into the flat naturalistic landscape of the average studio TV drama. But this would be to ignore the degree of stylisation which Potter brings to even the most naturalistically banal scenes. And director Piers Haggard (who previously directed *The Chester Mystery Plays*, a virtuoso exercise in studio electronics) gives the play a 'soft' look which emphasises its ethereal, fable quality.

The grand guignol of one fantasy murder number in the first part (Joan and her friends ritually stabbing Arthur) loses its gratuitousness in retrospect as murders become actual. Dreams, romantic or otherwise, inescapably trail darker currents. The ambiguity persists to the end, as Potter opts for a fairy-tale coda. In the death cell,



Jill Clayburgh in 'An Unmarried Woman'

Arthur reminisces with his guards about childhood—a reference back to the Wordsworthian concept of childhood enunciated in the school scenes. Then, in a pastiche of the 30s prison movie, Arthur is taken to the gallows and hanged. The screen fades to black, and a small white ball drops down the frame and bounces over the words of the song 'In the Dark', sing-along fashion. The ball dissolves into a clock face (the execution hour) as Eileen is about to jump from Hammersmith Bridge, when Arthur turns up like 'a bad penny', a penny from heaven. 'The song is ended, but the melody lingers on,' they say as they turn to camera in unison and mime to the final song.

As in *Follow the Yellow Brick Road*, there are echoes of *The Wizard of Oz* in Potter's new play, specifically when Arthur dances with a straw man during his flight from the law. Dreams are co-terminous with rotten realities, fun and pain are inextricably linked, and *Pennies From Heaven* triumphantly suggests that life (that 'delicious mess of insanities') can be had both ways, if you know the words of the song.

PAUL MADDEN

'Pennies from Heaven': Cheryl Campbell, Bob Hoskins



Harlan County USA

Harlan County USA (The Other Cinema) is the chronicle of a strike at the Brookside Mine in Harlan, Kentucky, which began in June 1973 and lasted for thirteen months. The original cause of the dispute was the painfully familiar issue of union recognition. The miners, who were members of the Company-run Southern Labor Union, voted to affiliate with the UMWA (United Mine Workers of America) in the hope of securing the higher wages and more stringent application of safety regulations already practised elsewhere. Brookside's owners, the Eastover Mining Company, refused recognition and the work force walked out.

These events show class conflict in almost textbook form. They were only a chapter in the Kentucky miners' long struggle for improved pay and conditions which has continued in strikes in almost every year since the film was shot, and in which is implicated Eastover's parent company, Duke Power, a vast corporation with interests in the energy supply industries all over the South. And yet it was not a strike like any other. Mining may again have become a key industry, but the strength of miners lies still in the solidarity and community spirit which were first created by their isolation and the peculiar nature of their job. They still have their own habits of mind and their own history, which is not that of the textbooks. It is made up of poverty, disease and exploitation, and is assiduously cultivated and passed down from generation to generation, giving miners a moral strength which is the source both of their survival and of their fascination to the outside world.

When the strike began Barbara Kopple, who produced and directed *Harlan County*, was already in Kentucky making a film on the rank and file movement within the UMWA. She simply stayed on, living with the miners and recording events as they occurred. It was a privileged position which is reflected in the intimacy of the document. What is recorded is the immediate experience of the strike, from the peculiar time-scale generated by periods of enforced idleness whose outcome is uncertain, to the quarrel of a miner's wife who accuses another of taking advantage of the strike to steal her husband (reply: 'I'm not fighting for a man, I'm fighting for a contract'). We see little of the nature of the miners' work or their frequently squalid living conditions, but we hear a great deal about them (for example, that many of the houses provided by the company do not have proper plumbing). Little is placed in space or in time, neither the geographical isolation of the miners' settlements in the mountains nor the venues of national union rallies.

One of the reasons is, of course, that the financial constraints on the film were considerable. Barbara Kopple has said that no commercial producer expressed interest in the project and that she was forced to raise money from charitable foundations. But the major reason was a deliberate decision to make a discursive film, one in which people find an otherwise repressed voice, and one which develops with some of the inconsequentiality of events. Those who talk in the film are mainly women because, as Kopple has said, 'The men in Appalachia are very low key, the women are very tough and very strong', because here the women are the source of community strength, the repositories of the collective memory. They survive when their fathers, sons and brothers are killed by the mine, and transmit the miners' history to the new generations and to the outside world. Typical in this respect is Florence Reese who, in one of the most moving sequences, sings 'Whose side are you on?', the song she composed at the time of one of the most violent confrontations with the Company, the 'Bloody Harlan' strike of 1931.

To all concerned it is clear that the system in Harlan is 'feudal'. The Company has a monopoly of labour in the era and an interest in it remaining unorganised; they will adopt mafia tactics in order to settle disputes, aided and abetted by the police who protect scab labour and the judiciary who limit the permitted number of pickets. It is only the brutal murder of a young miner which finally forces

negotiation and a settlement in favour of the strikers. As a rule, Kopple records these events simply by letting those involved speak. But there are two important interpolations. One is the chronicle of a power struggle within the UMWA over the same period. Tony Boyle, the Union President who is suspected of being a bosses' stooge, is arrested on a charge of murdering his left-wing rival, Yablonsky, and as a result the Union elections return a man from the rank and file. The other is interviews with outside observers, such as a doctor specialising in pulmonary diseases and a representative of the safety inspectorate, who recall that while mining is always dangerous, conditions in Kentucky are more dangerous than they need to be.

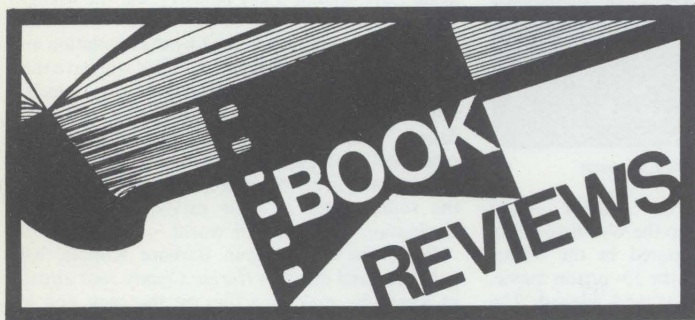
Some further perspective on events in Harlan is indispensable for the narrative organisation of the film in providing a context without which, though it is a month-by-month chronicle, it would be difficult to understand the miners' case. Even so, the narrative often remains confusing, the editing is

ragged, while the historical background is exclusively provided by folk-songs celebrating the struggles of the past and intercut film footage of similar pre-war conflicts. Of course, this is a further commitment to the miners' point of view. Their history is a continuous present, their isolation and solidarity accustom them to self-sufficiency and to the absence of change. When they eventually win the strike, there is no sense of elation but simply relief and muted hope that conditions will improve a little, and they reserve judgment on the new union boss who shows signs of wishing to relinquish their right to strike in return for a new contract. Kopple has said that she sees this film as a campaign pamphlet, a basis for political discussion, an 'organising tool'. But its strength is much more in the force of its appeal to a sense of moral outrage, in its portrayal of the inevitability of injustice, in a capacity to create solidarity by showing solidarity. It is in no sense a political film: it does not analyse, it speaks.

JILL FORBES



'Harlan County USA'



'I DON'T MIND THE SEX IT'S THE VIOLENCE': Film Censorship Explored

By Enid Wistrich

MARION BOYARS, £5.95 (paperback £2.25)

The unusual nature of the British system of film censorship finds expression in many ways, but none more peculiar than the manner in which its practitioners seem so frequently to have an anti-censorship attitude. It must be well nigh unique that in one decade two chief censors of films should both resign and publish books describing events during their tenure of office and that both these books should attack the maintenance of general film censorship for adults. Of course, it is also very English that they should in fact have headed different bodies and in the same city—John Trevelyan as Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors and Enid Wistrich as Chairman of the Film Viewing Board of the Greater London Council, the most powerful of all the local councils, in whom the true legal power to censor films lies.

The most valuable part of this book is its first half, in which Mrs. Wistrich describes the two years of her chairmanship of the Film Viewing Board (1973–1975), a period which saw the gradual development of attempts to rationalise the process of film censorship by the Council, first through the carrying out of a social survey, then through an emphasis on front of house publicity in cinemas and finally the abolition of censorship for adult viewing. Of these, only the second was successful (at the time). The obscurantism of the Home Office—which, in an

equally typically English way, prefers to govern in a state of wilful ignorance in case discovery of the real facts might spoil existing preconceptions—prevented the survey being fully carried out, for the Council could only afford on its own resources to have a pilot study made. However, Mrs. Wistrich and her Board produced on the basis of the pilot study and their experiences a very valuable report which will remain one of the more important documents on the subject, at least until the Williams Committee reports.

The grand climax, which was broadcast live on Capital Radio, was the debate in the full Council on the proposal from the Film Viewing Board to abolish film censorship in London for adults over the age of 18. It was in fact lost, and Mrs. Wistrich resigned her office on the morrow, thus marking an end of a short but remarkably coherent and intelligent attempt to reform film censorship. Much of this part of the book is scissors and paste or memoirs; but the author of the book was also author of the events, they were very recent and she puts together the train of events and the thoughts and feelings behind them clearly and cogently.

What is not given is an adequate analysis of the very complex legal issues which arose at this time in the courts, particularly in a series of obscenity or indecency cases in which the Festival of Light was closely involved. These were to have a profound effect on the Council, and the author's treatment of them is narrative, just as her later chapters on sex, violence and the nature of censorship are essays rather than deep studies.

Throughout, the book displays a sensibility and understanding which is rare among anti-censorship writers—and even rarer among writers in favour of censorship. It is valuable to have these campaign memoirs so soon after the event, and they will be a useful source for the more detailed book which must one day be written about this particularly turbulent period in British censorship history. But above all this is a very readable account of the thoughts and experiences of a particularly lucid leading actor in those events.

NEVILLE HUNTINGS

AMERICA IN THE DARK

By David Thomson

HUTCHINSON, £5.95

MASTERING THE FILM, AND OTHER ESSAYS

By Charles Thomas Samuels

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, £10.50

David Thomson's stimulating book *America in the Dark* (subtitled *Hollywood and the Gift of Unreality*) begins in the South London of his childhood, a drab maze of identical suburbs where cinemas seemed the only buildings to nourish the imaginative life: there were tea-shops, ironmongers, greengrocers, and then, suddenly, *Samson and Delilah* in fullest Technicolor. From the half-autobiographical opening chapter it's clear that Thomson, like many others, has found the siren call of America and its films impossible to resist. It was Hedy Lamarr, not Phyllis Calvert, who sparked the childhood fantasies: *Rear Window*, not *The Cruel Sea*, which ushered in the teenage realisation that cinema involves artifice, that someone was behind the scenes making it all happen. It's a sobering thought how little British cinema has inspired any passionate love affairs—even the infuriated, critical kind of love affair Thomson has with Hollywood and which he has made the subject for this book. But American soil, he points out, is fertile ground for all brands of artifice and dreams, unlike the damp, rational land of England: America is a man-made nation, founded on ideals. It's only logical

therefore that the author should ultimately live and work in America (he teaches at a New England college), and the book is steeped in his responses to American urban life, from the street violence to the bland outpourings of TV advertisements; this British edition of his book is even replete with American spellings.

In the light of much recent film criticism, *America in the Dark* is manifestly unfashionable. Thomson writes very well, for one thing. He also writes out of his personal experience and his wide knowledge of history and literature. Instead of adhering to a strict critical method, he ruminates, speculates and describes, alternating general surveys of the history and workings of Hollywood with individual treatments of specific films. He is at his best treating those areas of cinema where the myths often pass unchallenged: Griffith and *Citizen Kane*, for instance, are both taken off their pedestals. How cheering it is to find someone admitting outright that 'Griffith's films are often insufferable', or noting that elaborate interpretations of an auteur's every film ignore that some items may be produced in a spirit of self-mockery: films like *Jet Pilot* and *Sign of the Pagan*, he says, can be regarded as 'surging oceans of hokum bearing a survival raft and an S.J. Perelman-like author waving to his friends.'

The ruminations and comments, however, are far from random. Thomson's abiding concern is with the treacherous attractiveness of the 'unreality' Hollywood so effortlessly supplies—the way it asks us to expend emotions on impossibilities and lower our perception of life around us. Even the TV coverage of the Ervin Committee investigations, he notes ironically, raised more doubts and hackles than the glossy *All the President's Men*, which had the benefit of hindsight. I can think of no better current introduction to Hollywood history or the nature of popular cinema.

Thomson's book finds an odd complement in *Mastering the Film*, a collection of essays by Charles Thomas Samuels, who taught literature and film at Williams College, Massachusetts, and died in 1974 aged 38. Half the book contains chapters written for the unfinished

title project—a grandiose attempt to define film aesthetics; the rest consists of writing from his film column in the quarterly *American Scholar*. Like Thomson, Samuels writes with love for the medium, but it is love only for its isolated, demanding masterpieces; the rank and file product is imperiously ignored. Samuels also operates to a clear system. In preparing his book he contrived to see at least two films by every film director he had found 'mentioned with interest or respect'. He then attempted a definition of cinema through the joint effort of the directors who had made 'at least two major films and evolved a style that seemed both distinctive and excellent'. The notion seems completely worthy and completely dotty at the same time: one imagines Samuels dutifully sitting through a dreadful Reginald Le Borg or W. Lee Wilder in a fleapit—the penalty for catching a respectful reference to them in *Mid-Minuit Fantastique*.

It would seem, however, that Samuels consulted only orthodox sources, and from his Herculean labours produced a ladder of twelve good men and true, with Carol Reed and Renoir at the bottom, Bresson and Bergman at the top and Godard, Resnais and Buñuel nowhere at all. If one abandons Samuels' schema and concentrates on his individual criticisms of films, the book proves far more rewarding. The customary drawback of being a literary-minded critic is that too much emphasis is placed on narrative and motivation (avant-garde cinema is swept out of Samuels' consideration for just that reason), but it also encourages close attention to the texture of the film, the use of *mise en scène* to communicate feelings about the characters and their situations. Samuels is often highly lucid and perceptive about the films of his chosen heroes, and for British readers the book has the added value of including almost thirty pages detailed study of Carol Reed—thirty pages more than most other books.

GEOFF BROWN

A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU: THE PROUST SCREENPLAY

By Harold Pinter

With the collaboration of Joseph Losey and Barbara Bray

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Proust and 'la petite madeleine' go together like mousetraps and Cheddar cheese in the imaginations of those for whom reading *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* remains a task for tomorrow never quite accomplished. But not in Harold Pinter's screenplay—here published, but as yet unfilmed because finance has not been forthcoming—where poor, bedridden Aunt Léonie has vanished, and along with her the cake dipped in coffee she used to offer the young Marcel, and whose flavour subsequently brought Combray and his childhood flooding back from the past.

The little madeleine, of course, is only one of the tricks of memory

described by Proust, and its loss is hardly felt in the faithfully recorded presence of the stridently tinkling gate-bell (conjuring Swann's visits at Combray), the unlaced boots (carrying Marcel's grief at his grandmother's death), or the uneven paving stones (bringing Venice back intact). In its potent association of taste and smell with a tantalising childhood treat, it is however (as its fame suggests) the most evocative image in the novel; and while one must admire Pinter for having refused to take the easy way out, his substitution of the Vermeer painting 'View of Delft' as a focal point in his script doesn't quite come off.

In theory it should, since it is cleverly used as both a punctuating and an organising device within the opening sequence of twenty-two shots impressionistically conjuring the various aspects of Marcel's life to be recalled, explored and ordered in the body of the film. First seen as a mysterious 'yellow screen' (accompanied by the sound of the Combray gate-bell) linking isolated shots of Combray, Balbec, Venice and the Guermantes house, it is only revealed to be the patch of yellow wall in Vermeer's painting when the camera pulls back at the end of the twenty-second shot.

The trouble is that, in the film, the Vermeer painting never acquires the significance it has in the novel. We catch glimpses of Swann (who is writing a study of the painting) at various stages of his relationship with Odette, and we are told how he came to realise that he had wasted his life over a woman who was not even to his taste. But what is never conveyed in the script is the extraordinarily intricate process whereby, in Swann's imagination, a mild initial interest in Odette ripened, by way of speculation and supposition, first into jealousy and then into hopeless, all-consuming passion.

Swann, in other words, created Odette, his Odette, in the mould of his imagination, just as Vermeer created his painting; and having created her as an object of teasing, tantalisingly ambivalent perfection, became indifferent to his work of art while at the same time remaining unable to dissociate himself from his creation. Since this theme is orchestrated through the novel by the analogous process of Marcel's experience (in which, imagining a Lesbian sexual proclivity that tempers his love for Albertine in the purgatorial fires of jealousy, he also creates an imaginative image of a social Sodom and Gomorrah that reflects the reality of his desires and in which he becomes inextricably trapped), the intricate interlocking structure of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* tends to filter away in a series of disparate impressions in which the Vermeer painting plays no real role except as a relatively meaningless device.

Pinter's mistake, in fact, seems to have been in approaching Proust impressionistically, rather in the manner of *Accident*. Reluctant to jettison anything (although several central characters are omitted along with Aunt Léonie: Bergotte and Elstir, for instance, as the representatives of Marcel's artistic lean-

ings), Pinter has distilled the essence of the book into a suite of interlocking flashes that follow—in his own words—an architecture 'based on two main and contrasting principles: one, a movement, chiefly narrative, towards disillusion, and the other, more intermittent, towards revelation, rising to where time that was lost is found, and fixed forever in art.'

A supremely intelligent statement of the way the novel works, as Marcel simultaneously rediscovers his innocence while losing it in Sodom and Gomorrah; and one, in theory, accomplished with supreme skill in the script. The trouble, again, is that Proust is anything but impressionistic. Characters, places and emotions are tracked back and forth in time, exhaustively examined, reassessed and found to be ever changing in the constant process of Marcel's own evolution. They form, essentially, the perennially revisited way stations in his path towards artistic creation; and probably the only way they could be incorporated bodily (rather than one-dimensionally) into a film is by way of a voice-over narration.

As it is—even taking into account that a script is a film not yet given body—*A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is drastically reduced not so much in substance as in texture. We are given, for instance, a touching little evocation of the scene in which Marcel as a child, desolated at having been deprived of his mother's goodnight kiss by the presence of Swann at dinner, is unexpectedly rewarded after having defiantly

stayed awake. Gone, however, are the ramifications of the scene that not only make it so memorable but continue to reverberate through the novel: Marcel's absolute desperation (he knows that by staying up he risks eternal banishment to boarding school for this one kiss); his shame that Swann witnessed his abjectness (later rhymed with Swann's own abject posture before Odette); his mother's reluctant but dutiful cruelty (her answer to his note pleading for her to come to his room—'There is no answer'—is omitted); his astonishment (and first realisation that personalities are unpredictable and that principles are not absolute) when his father unexpectedly grants casual permission for the precious kiss.

Approaching Pinter's script with even a sound nodding acquaintance with Proust to call upon, one finds the texture of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* welling up in memory to fill the gaps. Otherwise it remains a very fine herring-bone structure on to which even images by Losey at his most evocative could hardly hope to graft an adequate covering of Proustian flesh.

To read the script for Alain Resnais' unmade *Adventures of Harry Dickson* is to see the whole world of Jean Ray unfolding before one. To read Pinter's script is to see, alas, merely a series of lacunae in between which Proust himself has melted away, and which one cannot really imagine as a film, only as an exquisitely aromatic concordance to the original text.

TOM MILNE

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Letters

French Cinema

SIR,—David L. Overbey's article *France: The Newest Wave* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1978) seems motivated to evaluate the work of certain 'new' French film-makers and rightly locates this attempt within the question of conditions of production.

That there is 'a crisis in French cinema' is attributable to a greater complexity of production problems than outlined by Overbey and, furthermore, it is equally important to consider questions of exhibition and distribution, since these are integral functions of the 'machine' cinema (in Heath's phrase) contributing as much to that crisis as do conditions of production. It is seriously neglectful, therefore, that Overbey omits discussion of the Paris 'art house' networks, the 'Cinéma d'Art et Essai' system, and the commercial context of an industry working with and against the dominance of Hollywood product and marketing.

From his partial sketching-in of the economic background, Overbey proceeds to acknowledge that his selection of interviews is perhaps arbitrary but representative. But, as Paul Vecchiali remarks, there are perhaps forty important directors now working. Among these I would suggest that Aubier, Bellon, Comolli, Doillon, Moati, Eustache, Dubois, Allio, Dubreuil, Cassenti, Richon and Blain in addition to those named in Overbey's list deserve urgent consideration in English. If this is beyond the scope of such an article it is all the more important to draw out from those interviewed an overview of the industry in which they work or, where this may be absent, to include an interview with at least one film producer (Hubert Niogret is a good example).

As it stands, Overbey's conclusions are obfuscated by the notion of 'creative energy' on the part of a handful of directors. Thus his statement that 'the French cinema is showing signs of a new creative life for the first time in a decade' is grossly misleading in that the period since May '68 has seen the emergence of a variety of new production initiatives, the Dziga Vertov Group, the MK2 collective, the *Cahiers*-originated productions (e.g. *La Cecilia*, *L'Olivier*), alongside the continued, often innovative, work of established Nouvelle Vague directors.

If it is possible to speak of a 'New Wave, Part Two'—a notion implicit in the title of Overbey's article but contradicted in the body of his text—it can only be through a thorough examination of the industry from 198

production, through distribution and exhibition, to criticism, taking account, at each stage, of the presence of Hollywood in French cinema.

Yours faithfully,

MARTYN AUTY

Programme Officer,
The Scottish Film Council, Glasgow.

P.S. The director of *Des Enfants Gâtés* is Bertrand Tavernier (not Bernard).

Agatha

SIR,—Many thanks to Chris Menges (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1978, p. 75) for his generous comments on Vittorio Storaro—my cinematographer on *Agatha*. There are, however, two small inaccuracies in his remarks. We had 3 million dollars to spend, not 'several'; and did over 500 set-ups in the three month shoot, not 'two shots a day'.

Yours faithfully,

MICHAEL APTED

Teddington, Middlesex.

A School Dream

SIR,—I would like to draw your readers' attention to the Grand Première of Colfox School's film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which took place on Thursday 18 May at the Palace Cinema, Bridport.

In March 1977 the school produced a Jubilee Production of Shakespeare's play which was a totally new concept of the play, being staged on three levels: an apron, the stage and a gallery, with the use of 'spirits' as additional choric performers to interpret the play to the audience and to comment on the action, with music specially written for an 'Elizabethan' orchestra, by Mr. R. F. Trevett. The play was produced by Mr. B. P. S. Critchinson. It was such an enormous success that it was decided to make a film version of the production. This was not simply a cinematic record of the play, but a full-length feature film (lasting 2½ hours, in colour), made by a professional director, Mr. John Miles, and a professional film crew: Amber Films of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

The cost of making this film was £12,000, which was raised by a number of local people on a loan basis. It is intended that the film, together with a new edition of the play and the complete music score, be offered to international educational publishers, who could, if they decided to accept the film, market it world-wide, selling video-tape and 16mm copies. Educational publishers are very keen to enter the field of educational 'software', i.e. tapes, filmstrips, slides and films, and many attempts have been made to publish professionally made films, but the demands of Equity, the actors' union, have made these attempts non-viable financially. Obviously, as the whole cast of the play consists of school pupils, such problems do not arise—and this is another reason for real hope that the future for the film may be good.

The best way to ensure that publishers will be interested in the venture is to raise the money ourselves, and to offer them the film with no initial capital outlay on their

part. They would then pay the school (nobody else) a percentage of each copy sold. Thus the only benefactors from the film will be the school and the area whose children will come here in the future. This is a local project, and it is hoped that local people will lend their support. This is an educational venture which has never been done before.

Colfox School is a Comprehensive school and the cast was fully comprehensive in that it contained pupils from remedial classes to potential University candidates. The comprehensive system has had its critics and I feel that this is a golden opportunity to redress the balance.

Yours faithfully,

BRUCE CRITCHINSON

Colfox School,
Bridport, Dorset.

The Magic Garden

SIR,—I feel moved as well as obliged to write you a letter of thanks for the help you and your readers gave me in my year-long search for the film *The Magic Garden*, directed by Donald Swanson and photographed by C. Pennington-Richards. In 1958 I saw this marvellous film in a cinema on the Champs-Élysées in Paris and ever

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

BARRIE GAVIN is a TV director and film-maker, editor of the *Omnibus* series from 1975–78 and former head of the BFI Production Board... PATRICIA GOLDSTONE wrote a thesis on MacLiammóir, Edwards and the Gate Theatre while at Trinity College, Dublin, and is now finishing her first novel... DON MACPHERSON is the editor of a forthcoming series of BFI publications on Independent Cinema in Britain... GRAHAM PETRIE is the author of *The Cinema of François Truffaut*, has written a history of the Hungarian cinema, and organised the NFT Fejös season... ALAN ROSENTHAL is a writer and film-maker at present preparing a book on political documentary... BARRY SALT is a lecturer in film at the Slade Film Department, University College, London, and is also an occasional film-maker... PETER WYETH is Fellow in Film-making at Leicester Polytechnic/East Midlands Arts. He directed *The Third Front*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *The Eagle's Wing*, *The Shout*.
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20th CENTURY-FOX for *An Unmarried Woman*.
COLUMBIA-WARNER for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.
CIC for *International Velvet*, *Coma*.
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MGM for *2001—A Space Odyssey*.
SOUTHERN CROSS for *The Getting of Wisdom*.

since tried to get a print for my small collection of movie films.

After I had placed an advertisement in the Spring 1977 issue of SIGHT AND SOUND I received letters of help from your readers from all over the world: Switzerland, France, England, Denmark, the United States, Canada, Australia and, last but not least, from South Africa. The film's director wrote me a very nice letter; the Swiss Cinémathèque contacted me; I got a letter from Mr. Basil Wright, other letters from film collectors like myself. All were of immense help. After about a year of correspondence, I had the joy of receiving—last week only, in fact—a 16mm print of this jewel of a film. After having run it through my projector several times, I must say that I was as moved by the film as I was back in 1958.

I should like to thank everybody for their kind assistance. And, at the same time, please do overlook the most terrible brand of English in which this letter of thanks is composed!

Yours faithfully,

DIETER KELLER

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BFI PRODUCTION BOARD for *Above Us the Earth*, *Time and Motion*.
PETER WYETH/DON MACPHERSON/ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN for *The Third Front*.
BARRY SALT/NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for all stills for the article 'Film Form 1900–06'. (Stills taken from the frame by Barry Salt.)
NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *A Trip to the Moon*, *Metropolis*, *Things to Come*, *Lonesome*, *The Last Moment*, *Marie*, *A Handful of Rice*, *The Seashell and the Clergyman*, *White Shadows of the South Seas*, *Les Vampires*, *A Film Johnnie*, *La Perle*, *Othello*, *Peter Ibbetson*.

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The Spring issue included a long and memorably lively interview with the late William A. Wellman plus the most detailed filmography of his career yet published. Also the career of Austrian director Karl Hartl is exhaustively detailed, Louise Brooks reveals "Why I Will Never Write My Memoirs", *Drôle de Drame* is reappraised, and the Cinemas column visits the Odeon Lewisham. Price 60p (\$1.75).

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The new Summer issue includes a lengthy, warm and revealing interview with Joel McCrea concentrating on the famous directors he worked with plus a full filmography. There is also a career study of Oscar Levant, the story of Universal's merger with International in the Forties, a special feature on the Radio City Music Hall, and a reappraisal of *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca*. Price 60p (\$1.75).

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Film Guide ★

*ADOPTION (Cinegate)

Down to earth but not simplistic look at a middle-aged woman struggling to find an identity and partly succeeding by befriending a troubled teenager. Flexibly directed, fluently played, if finally rather chilly. (Kati Berek, László Szabó; director, Márta Mészáros.)

*AMERICAN FRIEND, THE (Cinegate)

Brilliantly faithful to Highsmith so far as it goes; but really an imaginative transposition in which Tom Ripley (Dennis Hopper) becomes the quintessential Wenders hero in search of a human landscape for himself, and the film becomes a repository for a film buff's memories, dreams and nightmares. (Bruno Ganz, Gérard Blain, Nicholas Ray.)

*ARMY IN THE SHADOWS, THE (Artificial Eye)

Melville's dark personal testament to the French Resistance, made in 1969, mixes nostalgia, hagiography, melodrama and heroic disillusion. It powerfully conjures a world devoid of moral absolutes in which just amateur assassins attempt in confused anguish to do their duty. (Lino Ventura, Paul Meurisse, Simone Signoret, Jean-Pierre Cassel.)

*BAKER'S BREAD (Cinegate)

This well-carpeted first feature, although a shade attenuated, registers as an authentic record of both the art of baking and the slow maturing of a young apprentice baker. Flecked with gentle humour and played with winning freshness. (Günter Lamprecht, Bernd Tauber; director, Erwin Keusch.)

BETSY, THE (United Artists)

Harold Robbins' pot-boiler about Detroit's motor industry incongruously treated with discretion and a pained 'artiness'. Daniel Petrie concentrates on the guilt and despair surrounding Laurence Olivier's hollow-eyed patriarch, and thus misses even the vulgar vitality of the original. (Robert Duvall, Tommy Lee Jones, Katharine Ross.)

*CAPRICORN ONE (ITC)

Deliciously absurd thriller about big business and the space programme. Threatened with a shut-down if a proposed Mars shot fails, a scientist simulates the landing Hollywood style. But instead of going for black comedy à la *Strangelove*, the movie opts for boring, Bondish derring-do. (Elliott Gould, James Brolin, Hal Holbrook, Karen Black; director, Peter Hyams.)

*COMA (CIC)

Someone is selling the organs of freshly murdered patients at an ultra-modern Boston hospital. A taut horror story, played with conviction (notably by Genevieve Bujold) and bolstered with nicely authentic scenes of hospital politicking and surgical malpractice. (Michael Douglas, Richard Widmark, Rip Torn; director, Michael Crichton.) *Reviewed.*

*COMING HOME (United Artists)

Hal Ashby's intense, strangely low-key moral tale of a woman caught, ironically, between her physical passion for a paralysed veteran and her loyalty to her hawkish Marine Corps husband, absent in Vietnam. Flawed by a thin, sentimental script, but held together with palpably committed performances and a mosaic

of nostalgic songs. (Jane Fonda, Bruce Dern, Jon Voight.) *Reviewed.*

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE, THE (Rank)

Drawn from a best-seller by Morris West, this examination of the grounds for salvation—centred on a prospective saint executed by Italian partisans in World War Two—boils down to the bathetic conclusion that no one is irredeemable nor entirely saint-like. (John Mills, Stéphane Audran, Raf Vallone; director, Guy Green.)

*EDVARD MUNCH (Cinegate)

A less than objective portrait of the Norwegian painter, into which Peter Watkins has determinedly read his own plight as misunderstood artist. Rare for this traditionally bloodless genre, however, is the raw intensity with which he recreates a repressive society and Munch's tortured personal history. (Geir Westby, Gro Fraas, Johan Halsbog.)

*ENFANTS DU PLACARD, LES (Artificial Eye)

A film so shyly retiring that it looks better the second time round. The secret complicity of a brother and sister, echoing *Les Enfants Terribles*, becomes Dostoevskian despair when exposed to the cruel light of day. (Lou Castel, Brigitte Fossey; director, Benoit Jacquot.) *Reviewed.*

*EUROPE AFTER THE RAIN (Concord)

Dates, facts, paintings, photographs, interviews, sound poems and newsreels deluge the screen in Mick Gold's witty attempt to chart the history of Dada and Surrealism (along with their aesthetic and political contexts). The subject is only partially penetrated but there's much to entertain and instruct.

FULL CIRCLE (CIC)

A plangent score, mistily romantic photography and the presence of Mia Farrow, once more an undernourished adult waif, cannot salvage this impossibly convoluted horror story from its own cut-price ambitions. Infant depravity can seldom have been so decorously rendered. (Tom Conti, Keir Dullea; director, Richard Loncraine.)

*HEROES (CIC)

A Vietnam veteran's pursuit of a crazy pipedream across America by bus. Uneven, but very funny at first, and strangely touching as a new 'lost generation' of post-war casualties is gradually uncovered. (Henry Winkler, Sally Field; director, Jeremy Paul Kagan.)

*HIGH ANXIETY (Rank)

A parody of Hitchcock, in which Mel Brooks has marginally more fun—and seems better acquainted with the original material—than in his *Silent Movie* jape. Individual felicities (including Madeline Kahn) aside, it tends overall to be shapeless and indulgent. (Cloris Leachman, Harvey Korman.)

HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, THE (Hemdale)

Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, abetted by a roster of British stars, attempt to substitute some dusty old routines for the plot of this oft-told tale of moorland skulduggery. Dismal testimony to Paul Morrissey's misplaced enthusiasm for 'British humour'. (Terry-Thomas, Max Wall, Irene Handl, Denholm Elliott.)

*IMPROPERLY DRESSED (Essential)

Activist on the run in 1919 Hungary takes refuge at a remote sanatorium in female disguise. The film rather comparably evades political complexity in favour of pretty visuals and dramatic atmosphere. (Endre Holman, Erzsébet Kútvolgyi; director, Pál Sándor.)

IPHIGENIA (United Artists)

The third in Michael Cacoyannis' transpositions of Euripides, a version of the play about the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter to release the thousand ships becalmed at Aulis. The performances almost survive being

swamped by pretty pictures. (Costa Kazakos, Irene Pappas, Tatiana Papamoskou.)

**KINGDOM OF THE SPIDERS (Enterprise)

Unassuming relative of *The Birds*, with tarantulas going on an ecology-inspired rampage. Admirably staged, and all the more effective for paying attention to character and setting rather than nasty shocks. (William Shatner, Tiffany Bolling; director, John 'Bud' Cardos.)

MACARTHUR THE REBEL GENERAL (CIC)

An attempt, on the lines of *Patton*, to combine World War Two thrills with a tartly sceptical character study, which never gets beyond some ham-fisted jokes and Joseph Sargent's wistfully idolising direction. Transcending all the general's flaws, it seems, is his Hollywood producer's flair for publicity. (Gregory Peck, Ed Flanders, Dan O'Herlihy.)

MEDUSA TOUCH, THE (ITC)

Jack Gold's entry in the supernatural stakes begins intriguingly with the attempted murder of a man (Richard Burton) with the telekinetic power to will people's deaths. Thereafter, this psychic horror story simply becomes a preposterous series of catastrophes; Minster Cathedral, finally, threatens to collapse on the Queen. (Lee Remick, Lino Ventura.)

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS (Columbia-Warner)

A grotesquely histrionic film, whose gratuitous romanticism, sermonising and pose-striking prove even more stomach-turning than its violence. Based on one unfortunate American youth's real-life experiences in a Turkish prison, it veers opportunistically between a cosmic howl of anguish and a (distinctly racist) attack on the state of Turkey. (Brad Davis, Randy Quaid, John Hurt; director, Alan Parker.)

**OPENING NIGHT (Miracle)

Stunning performances all round as John Cassavetes uses the rehearsal of a play to confront the theatre with his own *cinéma vérité*, and to explore the Stanislavsky/Brecht acting mystiques from every possible angle. (Gena Rowlands, Ben Gazzara, Joan Blondell.) *Reviewed.*

**PIECE OF THE ACTION, A (Columbia-Warner)

Two-and-a-quarter hours of cosy comedy, cheerful connen outwitting drugs racketeers, and *Blackboard Jungle*-type uplift, in what should be an impossible shaggy-dog story. But Sidney Poitier's straightforward, sympathetic direction, and an undeniable moral conviction, make it strangely affecting. (Sidney Poitier, Bill Cosby, James Earl Jones.)

**SERPENT'S EGG, THE (Enterprise)

Ingmar Bergman's strangely dislocated political fable, about tyranny born of group psychosis and individual abdication. Set in Germany in 1923, when the country was floating high on inflation and political paranoia, the film gains from its *hommages* to Lang but not from its excessive *Cabaret* trimmings. (Liv Ullmann, David Carradine, Gert Frobe.) *Reviewed.*

*SHIPWRECK! (Columbia-Warner)

The struggle for survival (originally called *The Sea Gypsies*) of an Arctic Family Robinson marooned on the bleakly beautiful Alaskan coastline. Disney cuteness keeps threatening to run riot, but the superbly photographed animal sequences just about compensate for the dullness of the human material. (Robert Logan, Mikki Jamison-Olsen; director, Stewart Raffill.)

**SHOUT, THE (Rank)

Through an English country setting, and a placid day of cricket in the grounds of a lunatic asylum, Alan Bates (in rarely subdued form) trails stories of aboriginal magic and his power to deliver a lethal shout. Jerry Skolimowski's fragmented, puzzle-making method is as unsettling as

ever, but he has split Robert Graves' short story into more pieces than can be comfortably reassembled. (John Hurt, Susannah York, Robert Stephens.)

SILENT WITNESS, THE (Enterprise)

A world-wide gathering of talking heads talk about one of the major curios of the religious world—the Holy Shroud of Turin, whose detailed image of Christ can be recreated in 3-D. Presentation is wayward and clumsy, but the material itself obliges attention. (Director, David W. Roife.)

*SPECIAL DAY, A (Gala)

All Rome turns out to welcome Hitler in 1938, leaving a downtrodden housewife and an ostracised homosexual radio announcer to stage a brief encounter across the corridors of their deserted apartment block. Ettore Scola drains the screen of colour, which is amply restored by virtuoso performances (horribly dubbed in this version) from Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni as the unlikely neighbours.

*STRAIGHT TIME (Columbia-Warner)

Dustin Hoffman gives his best performance to date in this down-beat tale (perceptively scripted) of small-time criminals living by their wits and their own woebegone code. But Ulu Grosbard's flaccid direction doodles too long over the uninteresting love interest and finally fizzles out in a string of clichés. (Theresa Russell, Harry Dean Stanton.)

SWEENEY 2 (EMI)

In their second big-screen outing, the dirty cops from the popular TV series are taken to Malta, in what seems to be a desperate hunt for production values. For the rest, all the clichés of the cynical cops-and-robbers series have simply been spread twice as thinly. (John Thaw, Dennis Waterman, Denholm Elliott; director, Tom Clegg.)

TAKE IT LIKE A MAN, MA'AM (The Other Cinema)

Faltering, good-natured attempt to popularise the feminist cause, which gets some mileage out of a comic role-reversal fantasy but surrounds it with an unconvincing before-and-after character study of a middle-class convert. (Tove Maës; directors, Elisabeth Rygård, Mette Knudsen, Li Vilstrup.)

**UNMARRIED WOMAN, AN (Fox)

Paul Mazursky's lively portrait of a woman on the rebound from an ailing marriage. Accurately observed and nicely pivoted on a perfectly judged performance by Jill Clayburgh, even if it does tip over into sentimentality and a solution too neat to be true. (Alan Bates, Michael Murphy.) *Reviewed.*

WARLORDS OF ATLANTIS (EMI)

The presence of Cyd Charisse, as a puppet-like but still comely Martian, provides some of the few moments of incidental pleasure in this dinosaur fantasy, routinely cobbled together by the producer-director team of John Dark and Kevin Connor. (Doug McClure, Peter Gilmore, Shane Rimmer.)

WILD GESE, THE (Rank)

Richard Burton, Richard Harris and Roger Moore do their best to make mercenaries lovable, but after an entertainingly jingoistic hour (suggestive of the Cockleshell Heroes taking Entebbe), the film degenerates into a mess of half-baked political moralising. Andrew McLaglen's action set-pieces are as polished as ever. (Hardy Kruger, Stewart Granger.)

WORLD'S GREATEST LOVER, THE (Rank)

Gene Wilder's second farcical miscellany in imitation of mentor Mel Brooks—a modish spoof on Valentino and 20s Hollywood—has a few good ideas but far too many excesses, the over-indulgence of his own hyper-neurotic persona being just one of them. Carol Kane stands out despite the general hysteria. (Dom DeLuise, Fritz Feld.)

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